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The Moving Image

Noël Carroll
Farrukh Dhondy
Umberto Eco
Michael Ignatieff
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Brian Winston

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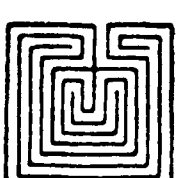

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Preface to the Issue, "The Moving Image"

In the Fall of 1982, *Daedalus* published an issue entitled "Print Culture and Video Culture." The observations of individual authors, together with the questions raised, seemed to provide an almost ready-made agenda for a successor issue. The Editor saw no particular hazard in promising such an issue for the following year. He was being incautious, for reasons not apparent at the time. As soon as discussions opened on what subjects a second *Daedalus* volume might treat, the possibilities were recognized to be legion. What Stanley Cavell had referred to as "the fact of television," how it had come to "conquer" as a "popular" medium and why, seems only slightly less mysterious than why, in the United States at least, there is so relatively little scholarly or critical attention given to film as a medium. Rapidly, recommendations flowed in for more ambitious inquiry, going well beyond television, delving into film as a genre, but linking this to literature, art, and popular culture. We live in the century of the "moving image," but have only barely begun to consider the cultural and social implications of that fact.

In planning sessions convened in London, Paris, and Cambridge, suggestions were made for essays that dealt with a vast array of subjects: "film as a diasporic medium"; film as a distorting medium"; and, half in jest, "film as the pickling brine of a national tradition." The first would have dealt with Indian film; the second with American and Japanese film; the third with British film. A recommendation that we consider the ways in which children are "colonized" by television, subjected to its authority, was quickly set aside; so, also, the suggestion that we consider how Soviet films have fared, particularly since the end of the Second World War, and why the record is so dismal, a "cultural imperialism that has clearly failed."

There was much greater interest in how developing societies absorb, resist, or succumb to the flow of moving images. The plotting

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of cultural and intellectual trade routes—of who produces, sells, and buys the visual products, of what we know about the choices, the audiences, and the entrepots of this vast new commerce—seemed compelling. So, also, was the question of whether we are witnessing an "Americanization" of world culture, effected principally through the American ability to find and fund powerful and popular themes, to dominate production, to organize the trade in ways that work to its advantage. The question of how film relates to literature—of what each is doing to the other—of how the novel, for example, with its narrative, is being today "translated" into film, and how film is accomplishing what the novel could never aspire to do, raises aesthetic issues of some complexity. Discussions on how theatrical and operatic performance are rendered on celluloid, whether they are distorted in the process, what videotapes and VCRs are doing to make such "high culture" available, whether their more important role is not to disseminate other materials, including the scatological, suggest why there is no easy way to establish a social or cultural profit-and-loss balance sheet on film in our century.

This issue of *Daedalus* points the way to the kinds of research now proceeding among those who are prepared to study film seriously; it also suggests what research is *not* taking place. Conventional opinion, which dwells so much on the power of the medium, the power of the American film "monopoly," is questioned. If the effects of film are indeed political and cultural, they are not as they are generally represented. Indeed, one of the signal contributions of this volume is that it suggests how film may reflect and express contemporary culture in ways rarely noted. The intellectual legitimacy of the enterprise—an inquiry into the moving image as a vital component of contemporary culture—cannot be questioned. If it serves to provoke new thought and publication, as it is intended to do (which is not to say that *Daedalus* will issue a third volume on the subject in 1986), we will be satisfied.

Anthony Smith, who did much to make the issue possible, introduces the volume with an essay that asks fundamental questions about the putative role of television in contemporary society. Concerned with how one measures the *impact* of the medium, how one goes about *proving* its influence, Smith is clearly disenchanted with those who argue as if television's power is absolute, that all contemporary good (and evil) can be attributed to its beneficient or malign

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force. Those who are most critical of television, he suggests, are generally men and women dismayed with today's social scene; they take for granted that our debased popular culture must in some way be related to the power of this diabolical machine. Television teaches; millions of innocents, hapless children and adolescents, are said to be bombarded by its grotesque messages. Who can doubt the "influence" of the medium? Smith knows that the issues are much more complex. Nor does he have much sympathy for those who see the "revolution" of our day as wholly good, who attribute the new "freedoms" largely to the liberating force of television. Surveying the research recently done on media influence, Smith asks whether much of it is not produced by an "army of politicized social critics" who use the material primarily for purposes of their own. Few of them seem to have any concept of causality that shows an appreciation of the complexity of social organization, let alone of the nature of culture.

Michael Tracey, similarly appalled by the simple propositions about film that circulate today, that make so much, for example, of the cultural dominance of outsiders, as if the world is a helpless victim subdued by a North Atlantic (principally American) cultural imperialism, shows how distant is the reality from all such fictitious constructions. Tracey knows that audiences in many parts of the world much prefer home-produced television, consistently choosing it over imported fare. There is clearly no universal pattern; there are also no uncontested monopolies. We need to know a great deal more about the conditions that obtain in specific societies; why in certain Islamic countries, for example, VCRs have created a passion for Western movies, and how these are "playing havoc with traditional values and morals." In Brazil, for example, where the national product dominates the air waves (a situation that does not exist everywhere in Latin America), there is an opportunity for dispassionate comparison. Those who write about "cultural imperialism," Tracey implies, seldom reflect on the appeal of American popular culture; they little understand what it communicates to diverse audiences. Believing that it is enough to cite "Dallas," and to do so sneeringly, they rarely ask why the program "travels" well to some places and not to others. The most interesting thing about television may be not in what it *imposes,* but in what it *taps*—and this calls for inquiry into why and how individual audiences are touched. We understand too little of the cultural experience of television, of how

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a shared culture is created, modified, or transformed. Overwhelmingly preoccupied with what is being communicated, we neglect to inquire into the concrete political-historical and cultural traditions that largely determine what audiences in fact receive.

If Michael Tracey's concern is with the entertainment conveyed by television today, Michael Ignatieff's interest is to reflect on how the medium structures and communicates what it calls "news." Taking the Ethiopian famine as significant, Ignatieff wishes to know whether the impressive international coverage of that human tragedy was an instance of "promiscuous voyeurism," or whether it ought to be seen as evidence of the "internalization of conscience." While television has certainly served to rouse Western public opinion and to make many aware of conditions in the Third World, it has also acted as an agency for teaching about "universal victimhood," thereby becoming an "instrument of a new kind of politics." Because television is so much better at exploring the consequences of situations than in explaining human intentions, Ignatieff asks whether this may not have the effect of legitimating to many the proposition that "the world has become too crazy to deserve serious reflection." There is a daily struggle for news "coverage," for audiences, massive and heterogenous, that will listen. There is today a "market" in images of horror, and it is undeniable that "commodities" are made out of other people's pain. But, in the end, according to Ignatieff, television news chooses to worship and celebrate power, state power particularly. Does it treat suffering with anything like equal respect? It does not! Still, television must be seen as one of the principal mediating agencies between suffering strangers and the consciences of the very few who still manage to live in safety in the twentieth century.

Noël Carroll, extending his gaze beyond television, but wishing not to ignore it, is concerned principally with why the moving picture has become *the* dominant art form of the twentieth century. It cannot be because movies are realistic, that they are accessible to anyone familiar with reality. Carroll's interest is in "popular mass-media films," the films of "Hollywood International," whether American, Italian, or Chinese, and whether produced for cinema or for television. These films engage vast multitudes; they do so with a particular intensity. As genuinely popular pictorial representations, they are quickly and easily mastered; they do not call for "any special learning process." An individual has no need to learn how to "read" pictures.

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Movies are powerful, Carroll says, precisely because they "allow masses of untutored spectators easy access to fundamental symbols in the system." This makes film more accessible, more immediately comprehensible, than other genres, including, most obviously, novels. They are also much more accessible than plays. The producer (filmmaker) is able to compel the audience to focus on what is really significant, to do this through particular technical cinematic devices. These serve principally to increase audience attentiveness, to make all action on the screen seem organized, intelligible, clear. It is the "uncluttered clarity" of movies that makes them so appealing; so, also, it is their narrative quality, with their implicit answering of questions, that makes them so compelling for so many.

If Carroll's interest is in all film, wherever created for a mass audience by "Hollywood International," Brian Winston's gaze is on a subset of this vast production, film in color, particularly as produced in the United States. Why should such a "case study" be included in this volume, and why should it be thought significant? Because it advances the somewhat startling proposition that technologies are rarely neutral, that they are best interpreted as an expression of a particular culture. Thus, in developing technical processes for rendering human color, in creating the technology for accomplishing this, the overwhelming Hollywood concern was to create a mechanism that would photograph Caucasians in a flattering manner. If this procedure required that other racial types be less attractively and less accurately represented, this did not much concern the inventors, who, in any event, would have denied any partiality in the matter. In their minds, they were simply representing and producing natural "fleshcolor," which, for them, was synonomous with white. As movie production became more capital-intensive, as it became increasingly difficult for outsiders to intrude, and not only because of the capital shortage produced by the world-wide Depression, but also because of controls imposed by those who owned patents and were wary of any who might steal them, films came increasingly to be made in studios, where the controls of lighting, particularly for color film, was crucial. Color was never "realistic"; it was used in the beginning mostly "to denote luxury, spectacle, or fantasy, and a celebration of its own technological mastery." Cultural determinants, Winston explains, much more than any kind of "crude conspiracy"

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explain why a film stock was never developed in the United States that gave good black skin tones.

Farrukh Dhondy, in his analysis of Indian film, little known in the West, but vital to tens of millions of Indians at home and to millions more in the diaspora, wishes to show how political and social determinants, that have cultural resonance for that part of the human race that sees itself as Indian, guide film producers today, making their product popular. Indian film, Dhondy writes, needs to be seen as a celebration of the "mythical moralities of a settled agrarian way of life," where virtue invariably triumphs. Implicit in this is a condemnation of the chicaneries of the West but also a lauding of the honesty of the East, couched in romantic plots that have some resemblance to Europe's medieval mystery plays; their messages are always clear, simple, and unchanging. The narrative, sentimental and predictable, depicts a virtuous society struggling to resist a rapacious and sordid modernity. The Indian audience craves a "celebration of truth, love, justice, brotherhood, sense of order," and though it may itself never have known any of these things, it wishes to experience all of them in its cinemas. Film provides, partly through the rediscovery of Hindu myth, what reality can never give. Many of the Indian films are musical extravaganzas, elaborate expressions of a single formula, dwelling always on feudal innocence and city wickedness. Such films are almost wholly inaccessible and meaningless to Western audiences, whether working-class or professional. Indian film producers appear to have no interest in creating a more "universal" market for their products; the Indian market is quite large enough, and is given what it so obviously craves.

Because film has been so popular a medium, creating wholly new entertainments and making information available in wholly new ways, and at the same time resonating to deep cultural needs, it is helpful to look at an area where the success of film has been partial at best. Judith Wechsler, writing about films on art, reflects on what these films have managed to accomplish over the years, why they "have not yet had a powerful and pervasive effect on the way we see." Believing that "we have not yet developed a vocabulary and syntax for presenting art history visually," Wechsler has little interest in denying or disparaging the quality of individual films on the art of a specific period, on individual artists, or indeed on whole genres of art. Rather, her essay suggests why film today is neither replacing nor

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seriously challenging the printed text (book, learned article, glossy magazine) as a prime source for either art criticism or art appreciation. That a visual medium should be doing so little with visual texts must be thought surprising. Yet, as Wechsler demonstrates, the challenge for the filmmaker is "to present a painting, which is spatial, in a time frame," and to do so in such a way that the filmmaker's vision is explicit and recognized to be crucial. The camera is not an eye; film techniques ought ideally to "enliven the experience of looking." If they fail to do so, if they neither encourage closer looking nor provide fresh and useful information, their expense will always be thought prohibitive.

Umberto Eco, commenting on contemporary films, recognizes how much they refute the conventional idea that art requires novelty, that only the crafts depend on repetition, the constant reproduction of the same thing. That idea would have been wholly alien to the ancients; classical aesthetics laid no great stock on innovation. Only in the eighteenth century, according to Eco, with its set and stable life, were individuals led to crave novelty, and to seek it in their art. Today, when everything is again in flux, when instability appears to be the order of things, there is a renewed wish to relax, to seek repose, to find comfort in the familiar, in redundancy, in what Eco calls the "serial"—a synonym for repetitive art. The wish is to hear and see the familiar, superficially disguised, containing few surprises. The genius of the contemporary cinema is that it is not striving for novelty in the tradition of nineteenth-century Romanticism. Television thrives on seriality, on the repetition of a few themes, on familiarity. More than that, the media are now in something of an incestuous situation in relation to each other, borrowing *topoi* from each other, knowing that those in the audience with greater familiarity with past production will see and comprehend what the more innocent observer cannot possibly know. Eco believes that we are "witnessing the birth of a new aesthetic sensibility," that it is much more "archaic," that this is what makes it truly "post–post-modern." Suddenly, we are confronted with a wholly new problem, of trying to understand the role of repetition in the arts, how the mass media today both explore and exploit the familiar.

Jonathan Miller, in asking, as Henry James did, whether illustrations ever contribute to the illumination of a text or whether they simply inhibit and restrict the imagination, is in fact pondering

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whether reading a description can ever be the same thing as seeing it in the form of a picture. Is there, in short, a difference between the "mental picture" as seen by the mind's eye, and the physical picture as seen by the human eye? The question is important for anyone concerned with how literature is "translated" into a "text for visual representation." Miller knows that mental images are difficult to define. Are they at all like paintings, or do paintings necessarily interest us in other things, including the object itself, the brushwork, the techniques employed? Are mental images like photographs? Not at all, Miller says, if only for one reason: photographs are physical objects, with concrete and real presence. Mental images are always vague, and while a certain vagueness may also attach to real pictures, the phenomena are different. In the end, we are compelled to ask whether mental pictures are images at all, or whether they are not essentially propositions, appearing only superficially to be pictorial. If images represent objects, then propositions, Miller writes, "express assertions *about* objects and about the relationship between them."

Roger Shattuck, pursuing an analogous inquiry, asks what the nature of thought is, whether thinking is "impossible without arbitrary signs," what the relations between thought and language may be. Citing the example of Proust, who believed that the writer is essentially a translator, Shattuck suggests that man may be defined as "the animal who translates." If thought exists before language, as many believe, and if the imagination does not require language for its expression, the visual media need never have become dependent on written tests—novels, and plays—in the way that they have. Early silent film—"pure cinema" in the words of René Clair—often avoided narrative, exploiting other visual possibilities. Such efforts are still made today, but only in experimental cinema. The conventional film, whether prepared for television or for the movies is "twice translated, twice removed from elemental and unarticulated thought processes." What we see mostly today, Shattuck explains, is an "illustrated story in which pictures take over from works." Flaubert had warned that such illustration "short-circuits the reader's imagination and prevents him from conjuring up a character or a scene out of his own associations and fantasies." Flaubert, for Shattuck (like James, for Miller) gave a warning that has been too little heeded. Film and television, in their desire to illustrate, have depended on literary scripts. Only in the interstices of these contemporary productions is

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there any room for the non-narrative, for forms of expression that may be said to have analogies to poetry and music. Shattuck asks whether film, so dependent on words, may not have "reached a limit in the direction of adaptation and representation as painting may have reached a limit in the direction of non-representation."

It is a tribute to the John and Mary R. Markle Foundation that it has been willing to fund an inquiry of the kind undertaken by *Daedalus,* that in its concern with the visual, with the moving image, it has not been led to narrow its own vision, to support inquiry only into those few issues that command mass media attention. We owe great thanks to the Markle Foundation for permitting and indeed encouraging the latitude suggested by the collection of essays in this volume. It is to be hoped that further explorations, no less bold, will occur elsewhere, questioning the conventional platitudes about the visual media that are all too common in our time, and that serve mostly to conceal the true "revolutionary" implications of the explosion of film.

S.R.G.

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Anthony Smith

The Influence of Television

OUR REPERTOIRE OF WORKING mental images does not seem at the present time to contain an apt metaphor or convenient cliché that sums up the flow of influence between a fresh technology and human society. We are free to borrow from economics the idea of the multiplier, or from scientific discourse Thomas Kuhn's idea of the paradigm collapse. Engineering and telecommunications are willing to lend us all manner of forces and thrusts, scatterings and pressures, but really nothing that provides a convincing and transposable conceptualization of the causal influences that pass between a new form of equipment and the organized minds and bodies of people living in society.

In the case of systems of communication, the omission is very deeply felt, since it is difficult in practice to talk about the coming of the telegraph, the telephone, radio, and television without automatically, virtually unconsciously, suggesting cause-and-effect processes where some more complicated structure of simultaneity is probably more appropriate. Media historians almost accidentally leave a residue in the reader's mind compounded of these unargued impacts and influences. For example, Elizabeth Eisenstein in her remarkable books about the coming of print[1] leaves one with the feeling, even when one is on one's guard against easy statements of causality, that the printing press was after all a kind of autonomous pivot of the whole of Western history. In the 1980s we, too, are living through an era of great and probably rapid social and technological change, and we are daily injected with a stream of suggestion, emanating from equipment merchandisers as well as the media, to the effect that the

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new machinery of information, at the center of all innovation, is itself, on its own authority, as it were, changing the contours of human societies. It has also become easy, through contrariness, to dismiss the impact of these new systems of information storage or transmission or to overlook the subtly transforming power of the bureaucracies, corporations, and institutions that surround them. As quickly as one kind of influence is denied, another springs into parlance. Communication researchers, using empirical evidence rather than conjecture, have passed through phases when their conclusions all seem to converge on "big effects" followed by phases when they revert to "little effects," as the formulation of the questions about radio, television, and advertising alter.

There was an era, just at the point when television started to become a mass medium, when researchers were concerned with the ways in which influence was disseminated. Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld produced a carefully worked model of the flow of cultural influence in a community.[2] The "two-step" flow had already become a widely accepted paradigm.[3] Then the television studies started to flow, and after a period when people thought that the new medium was capable of transformation of consciousness, a withdrawal from "hypodermic" effects set in. Television in the early 1960s was thought to exercise its influence on mores, styles, political attitude only as one factor in many;[4] it was incapable of bringing change in itself. Filling the gap between screen and viewer there was a vast thicket of socializing forces and resistances.

Two divergent trends helped to bring back "big effects" in the later 1960s. The McLuhanites, on the one hand, drew attention almost flippantly to the pervasiveness of television as a sheer presence: it did not bring effects because it was an effect.[5] It prepared the senses in its own way, but left them able to respond only to the medium itself. Other media had their own specific affective and cognitive ethos. We simply lived now in the shadow cast by this vast intruder onto all experience, onto all events.[6] On the other hand, a different research tradition was being developed, based partly upon the "gatekeeper" and "agenda-setting" studies inspired by newspapers since World War II:[7] there was a growing interest in the professionalization and socialization of producers, journalists, directors who create, not influences in us, so much as the information to which we as viewers react. There was also a growing school of researchers, emanating

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largely from France and Britain, who concerned themselves with the content of television as a text, as a signifying apparatus that enveloped the audience, as a machine that created not "attitudes" so much as the "realities" in the context of which beliefs and attitudes arose.[8]

As the interest in the cultural conditions of the Third World arose in the last decade, the new "big effects" wave continued to grow. The information industries of the West seemed poised to sweep away whole culture with a vast electronic broom. Fear of American power and fear of excessive media influence went together.[9] In the last two or three years, however, a small reaction has set in. Students of Third World and developed world culture have come to realize that American television does not necessarily dominate the attention of audiences whose locally produced entertainment and information is reasonably competently made. The growth of production competence and the development of indigenous resources has quelled a number of fears, especially regarding South America and parts of Asia. The huge indigenous film industries of the Far East offer a hope, at least for the moment.

Nonetheless, within the developed world the belief that most newly perceived social phenomena are the direct result of television influence is strong. Indeed, it has gone into a period of self-sustained growth, especially among political groups that have lost confidence in their own powers of leadership. Television is treated as if it retains the last surviving power of legitimization in society, by politicians who feel their functions have been long ago usurped, blown away in a media wind.

The real problem is that there exist no conceptual tools with which to begin to handle the problem of media effects. One can take, as a parochial example, the issue of the televising of the British Parliament, pressure for which has existed for many years, partly out of a desire for "modernization," partly in the belief, held by many, that television, by amplifying the debates, would somehow improve the level and quality of political life.

In the course of 1985, the television channels started, for the first time, to transmit debates from the House of Lords, the elected house of Parliament—the Commons having taken a more cautious or perhaps coy view of the value of television to their proceedings. The debates look exactly as they must have done a century ago: rows of old men (nowadays a few old women, too) speaking rather slowly

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and sometimes rather boldly about the affairs of the moment, their actual legislative power having been removed some generations ago. Clearly, the impact of television upon the working peerage, so to speak, is going to be interesting; it is certainly going to be exaggerated. The effect of the experiment upon television is going to be interesting and similarly unmeasurable. Nonetheless, one can predict a number of attempts to formulate the influences, to turn them into questions capable of generating quantitative answers and to produce a stream of case studies and research analyses. Upon these, political scientists—especially those who have had little cause to ponder the ineffable nature of media effects—will construct theories of historical change. We shall be told that the House of Lords has gained in power, has become a new forum of debate, under the impact of the medium of television. In one way, the researchers will be correct, in that television will have played some kind of role in helping concentrate attention upon a number of debates in the Lords that have always been well-argued, topical, and relatively devoid of party rancor. Perhaps television in this case will play the part of the "vanishing mediator" that serves as the carrier of change but which can disappear once a society recognizes and absorbs the message or lesson concerned. Nonetheless, statements to the effect that "television has restored the faded power of the House of Lords" will not be correct. Why?

First, because "television," as the subject of such statements, does not exist. It is the decision of the House of Lords to admit the cameras that represents the crucial change, the television coverage itself being the result of a shift in attitude on the part of a number of people. Second, because the influence upon the viewing public, whatever it is, will be that of the content of the debates and the images of the speakers, which exist independent of the interposition of cameras. If one assumes that, in the statement concerned, the term "television" is to stand for this gamut of phenomena, then the statement can be assumed to be true but extremely deceptive in its semantic spread. The variables can spread outwards far and wide: one might conjecture that the Lords, when they took their decision, were influenced by the newly acquired belief that the admission of cameras would enhance their influence and their public aura; in other words, that the cameras came as a result of a bid for influence. At the other end of the argument, one might say that the viewing public, starved of access to

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the presentations of clearly argued debates on public issues, have accepted and been gratified by the offerings of the Lords, the Commons being denied to them on television and being subjected in radio to damaging extractive coverage (the listeners in any case being appalled by the raucous behavior of the elected chamber and the absence of dignified debate). The qualifying and explanatory variables multiply as one examines the bald statement of impact. Causes turn into effects and effects into causes. Is it possible, even after identifying as many of them as possible, simply to say television "did this" or "brought that about"?

Clearly, there are many who can write extensively about modern media, happy in the casual application of causal statements. An extreme example occurs passim in a recent book entitled *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behaviour,*[10] but one extract may illustrate the point:

> Television has helped change the deferential Negro into the proud Black, merged the Miss and Mrs into a Ms, transformed the child into a "human being with natural rights." Television has fostered the rise of hundreds of "minorities" people, who in perceiving a wider world, begin to see themselves as unfairly isolated in some pocket of it. Television has empowered the disabled and the disenfranchised by giving them access to social information in spite of their physical isolation. Television has given women an outside view of their incarceration in the home. Television has weakened physical authorities by destroying the distance and mystery that once enhanced their aura and prestige. And television has been able to do this without requiring the disabled to leave their wheelchairs, without asking the housewife to stop cooking dinner, and without demanding that the average citizen leave his or her easy chair.

It is an overblown statement, taken I think not unfairly from a book that deals deliberately and extensively in such material. But the quoted paragraph only puts serially a range of widely held and constantly restated notions. In their sheer cumulative appearance they shock the reader (or some readers) into a cautious awareness of the problem. It is the problem of how to talk about the media without forgetting that one is talking about society, how to grapple with the overwhelming nature of the presence of television without losing one's sense of sociological proportion. The new media of this century (perhaps those of previous times, too) have been and are still being presumed to be autonomous agents acting coercively upon the public,

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both necessary and sufficient causes of stated consequences. Social science has rather tended, especially since the upswing of interest in the media in the 1960s, to run after the discussion in search of a relevant contribution and has become caught up, inextricably, in endless regressions, constructing increasingly subtle ways of measuring phenomena that are more the result of linguistic confusions than of real events.

In many ways it is not surprising that the considerable changes in social and, especially, sexual mores in the last quarter century have been attended by an intensification of the various debates about popular culture. The tide of liberal thought has ebbed and flowed. Suspicion of the intentions and motives of commercial suppliers and exploiters has been fueled. Supporters of public regulation have required material evidence to justify their pressures and counteract the forces of the apparently free market in cultural goods. The content of television has offered itself as an easy and tangible ground on which to conduct a large series of struggles. The problem is that statements about "television" are as unverifiable as other statements about culture. The demand for "evidence" is more a function of the intensity of the debate than of the potential for increasing certitude. Social science has gotten itself into something of a scrape in the matter of television, especially in the area of violence; none of the various sides in the argument about violence will permit social science to depart from the field, not the moral indignants, not the television executives, not the police. As the years pass, social science, weighed down with the sheer accumulation of unconvincing research, is more than ever embroiled in an argument in which it is better equipped to be observer than participant, student of form rather than referee.

At the risk of seeming parochial, one may cite a flurry of correspondence that appeared in *The Times* of London in November and December of 1984. The letters could have been penned mutatis mutandis in many other countries in the last many years. The exchange began when the director general of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA; the body set up by government which licenses and supervises nanny-fashion the fifteen commercial television stations in Britain) made a speech in which he declared that "there is no evidence" (a fatally provocative suggestion) "that television makes ordinary kids into violent kids"; he added the familiar cautionary variable, long asserted and always "controlled for" by social scien-

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tists, that the more aggressively inclined may be tempted to watch a greater amount of violence than the less aggressively inclined.[11] The bevy of letters this provoked came from familiar or predictable quarters. William Belson, author of *Television Violence and the Adolescent Boy,*[12] was first into the lists, denouncing the self-exculpatory position of the public broadcasting authority. Belson's own research had shown, he assured the readers, that long-term exposure "increased substantially" the extent to which adolescent boys engaged in violence; the evidence indicated that a multiplicity of factors along with television are involved and that "the effects may take years to show up fully as behaviour."[13] The IBA has its own staff researchers and one of these, Dr. Robert Towler, wrote within a week to indicate that Belson was too eager to treat as *major* the contribution of television to the complex of factors contributing to teenage violence. The increase is due to manifold causes (Belson had said this himself) within which television is placed as a mere scapegoat. Belson, argued Towler, had not tackled the question of what constitutes violence, an omission that was shortly to be remedied in a forthcoming work by another of the IBA's research staff[14]; Belson had not made distinctions between fictional violence and violence in news bulletins.[15] Belson's reply, some days later, brought out the essentially political nature of the dispute and the way in which one group of researchers see themselves as having laid siege to powerful and irresponsible institutions. His argument indicates the way in which social science, as much as any lay commentator, treats television content as product rather than process, as a definable object created by one party and taken in by another: "If on some matter of social importance there is even a *possibility* that a public authority is allowing harm to be done to those it is meant to protect, then the truly responsible administrator within it will take steps to avert that possibly harmful outcome."[16] The point at issue between the two social scientists is not a question of culture—which could not be handled in the same way—but of social pathology, of fixed laws of human conduct, of quantities and sufficiencies. But they have become drawn into an argument that has to be settled in the cultural sector, even though the only tools in their bag are tools of certitude.

Let me in parenthesis offer an analogy. Suppose the discussion had been about obesity, and one scientist had said that donuts, *among other substances,* are now pretty well proven, if taken over the long

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term, to be a significant cause of obesity among young people. And suppose the other had replied that the former should have made provision for important variables between jam donuts and the healthier kind of cheese donuts. Then, imagine our reaction if the former scientist had replied to the effect that local health officials, charged as they are with the task of ensuring health products against the purveyors of unhealthy goods, should accept the responsibility for ensuring the elimination of what may be just one of a number of known causes of obesity.

The real key to the discussion lay in the letter that was published between those of the two scientists, a letter from Mary Whitehouse, whose contributions to all public discussion of this kind are de rigueur. Mary Whitehouse is as household a name in Britain as they come, seasoned campaigner as she is since 1960 for the elimination of explicit sexual representations, obscenity, excessive violence, and certain forms of moral and political dissidence from the television screen. For her, as a lay campaigner, the two social scientists were dealing in matters of proven certainty. For her, the social sciences are not sciences by analogy but zones of fixed knowledge. "What is now most urgently needed is less talk and far more action to demonstrate the will and determination of the IBA to put into effect its published codes on the portrayal of violence." In his speech, the director general of the IBA, she averred, had been "defending the indefensible." As for Dr. Towler, whose point about the necessity of distinctions as to what constitutes violence was lost upon her, she declared: "Dr. Towler says we must tackle the question of what constitutes television violence. Heaven help me!—as if we didn't know."[17] Whitehouse represents a more direct form of social power behind the debate over television violence, that force in society that does not want the discussion to remain a cultural discussion, but sees the changes and deterioration in social mores to be the result of an activity or conspiracy. In some quarters, the objections to television violence came from the Left, in the form of denunciations of commercial exploitation of the mass audience for profit; equally frequently today the attack is from the Right, which sees irresponsible television as the chief agency of social change and which fights what one researcher sees as a last-ditch battle against the secularization of society.[18]

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There was a parallel and simultaneous debate under way, however, in another London daily newspaper, the *Daily Telegraph,* and into this the trenchant theater and television critic Milton Shulman lobbed an important missile. "Anyone studying the literature would be aware that the evidence identifying television as a *major* contributor to violence, is as clearly and scientifically established as the relationship between cigarette smoking and lung cancer. It is true that there are still a few pockets of resistance to these findings, shamefully enough confined to spokesmen for television in this country."[19] The Shulman quotation provides the key to the whole question of the involvement of social science—it is the certainty demanded of science and treacherously withheld that is the problem for those who support "big effects" theories of the media, the certain and applicable knowledge of chemistry and medecine. "Violence," itself a linguistic construct, as much as "labor" is an abstracted construct from "work," or "liquidity" from "money," is felt to be as specific as a disease. In truth, it has become a kind of commodity derived from an attribute. Violent acts are deemed to be varieties of the same substance, their sameness derived from their motivation rather than from the moral values through which they are discerned. In the age of the media, "violence" has been conveniently constructed as a term of debate but treated as a unitary phenomenon. It is not surprising that non-scientists snatch at the apparent certainties when the social scientists are themselves willing to take part in the debate on precisely the terms requested. The approximation of the answers merely infuriates and increases the demand for more precision, therefore more distinction of definition.

There are other debates engulfing the mass media in which the same patterns manifest themselves. The question of "information flow" between the countries of the developed and developing worlds is one obvious parallel, and one just as politically charged as the violence debate, equally omnivorous of all quasi-data, bereft of relevant contextual considerations. Television has become excessively central to a series of other and quite necessary discussions about the moral condition of the world. So great are the concerns it generates and so much do they intersect with a number of other agenda items (deregulation, freedom of expression, the right to know), that there is a considerable danger that priorities get out of balance. In Britain, the first new statutory censorship body has been set up to inspect and

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certificate all videotapes sold to the public. It is to be illegal to offer for sale a videotape for domestic use which does not contain a censor's certificate. All previous works are being put through this new media mill, at a cost of many millions in censors' time, and all this entirely as the result of the new moral panic about videotapes offering particularly violent sadomasochistic and other undesirable material. It is instructive to note that the score of videotapes that provoked the wave of parliamentary concern (the so-called "videonasties") disappeared from sale prior to the legislation as a result of increased vigilance by the police and courts using other existing laws. The new censorship has been imposed by people who, only a month or two earlier, would have shunned the suggestion that any form of statutory censorship should ever return to Britain.

Television, however, has become the location of compulsory participation in the society; it sits where in one sense the Church sat in previous ages, and where the school has been for a century or more. Arguments over television legislation and deregulation are currently the place of outcrop of an older pressure for the control of mores through cultural censorship. Interestingly enough, the desire for videotape censorship even overrides, and certainly contradicts, the desire for rapid deregulation of television as an industry—though it comes from exactly the same quarters.

The evolution of the discussion in the United States over the Surgeon General's massive investigation of 1972 illustrates the conceptual spread that is presently underway in the television and violence debate. The 1982 update of the Report of the Surgeon General[20] reveals the way in which the discussion of media content has both become impossibly remote from the certainties required by the contending parties and has spread much farther afield than was envisaged when the investigations commenced. The role of television is today, according to the update, being researched in the fields of consumer socialization, sex-role consciousness, family life, education, etc. One may conclude that the discussion, together with the 3,000 new research studies since 1972, has dissolved further into the fields of general cultural discussion and concern about values. Rather than unravel the complexities concealed within the bald premises of earlier research, the newer researchers are choosing to extend the notion of television influence and trace its impact upon other trends evident in society.

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Naturally, correlations can be found between a phenomenon as widespread as television viewing and many other phenomena. One would expect a ubiquitous and omnivorous medium to contain *the means of influence* in a myriad fields, because it contains so great a preponderance of significant representations. What makes the underlying proposition of effects research so unsatisfying is the sheer lack of what one might call an underlying theory of personality. The influences that are the objectives of research to capture and explain are deemed to occur at the point of connection between screen and mind; so much attention is concentrated on filling that tiny gap in the complex cycles of connections between medium and society that the cultural location of the influence, the self of the viewer, has been almost casually ignored, as if it were not relevant to the project of research. If there is any viable measure of the immensity of the experience of the television medium in our time, then it has surely to lie in the exploration of the space that television's content actually enters. If one begins the search with a precise question, the answer to which is required for some other societal purpose, the answer is indeed likely to be an unconvincing confirmation of the hypothesis, rather than a dynamic discovery concerning the interaction of the period's principal engine of culture with the selves of the society as they are. Furthermore, there are likely to be "influences" which are neither noticeable nor measurable in individuals but which inhabit only a territory of intersubjectivity or are interesting only in terms of their collective intersubjective role. Vast areas of disquisition here open up, fields that belong to disciplines that have never—perhaps wisely—chosen to try their luck with this set of questions.

There is a possible four-stream typology of the existing television effects research, one which would almost certainly be described as over-crude by the authors of the mountainous product concerned. There are two kinds that might be labeled "personal" since they are concerned with influences upon persons: one of these tends to concentrate on perceived impact (violence research is very typical of this group) and the other on the receiver's motivation (this is often labeled "gratifications" research, as it concentrates on why people choose to select the material of a particular kind). The other two branches might be labeled "social," in that they are concerned with the way in which the media manipulate available choices in society; of these the former can, albeit rather loosely, be grouped around the

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notion of agenda, the influencing of the prevailing concerns of a society, while the latter searches for the ways in which the "text" of given media content structures in itself the dominant representations available to the audience—in other words, focuses on the medium's role as a creator of meaning. As one works through the literature one can assign most studies to one of these piles, though some are of more than one variety and some, admittedly, do not seem to fit at all. The problem besetting all of them is that an army of politicized social critics are waiting to *use* the material for reasons of their own. All of them are clustered around the gap between screen and audience, attempting to discern transpositions, observe behavioral homologies, discover imprintations. It is at that very point of contact between medium and audience that the wedges of censorship are imposed, or attemptedly imposed, that public panic is steered. Those essentially political processes are amplified by the research, seldom assuaged, never placated or gratified. Media research has made it possible to open up debates that had been temporarily concluded in liberal societies, but to do so on ground that is both scientifically and morally shaky. The objection is not to the opening up again in new guise of the ancient debate about the role of the state in art and representation, but to its being done in these forms and with these motives.

True, each society will find a way to set up a mechanism to anchor the arts (taken in a broad sense of the term) to the state. The contents of the media permeate. They soften the soul, in Plato's sense, and are in constant contest with the state as to which should play the greater role in shaping the soul. The conflict over television is like the conflict over art in that it is about rival conceptions of human nature. The difference is that the effects researchers share an unspoken and under-delineated doctrine of personality as the product of imitation rather than of internal conflict of forces. When we are dealing with questions of science pure and simple, we may adopt a tighter notion of causality than when we are dealing with influences that operate within the personality, within human nature, where, if we abandoned the axiom of free will, we fall unchecked into circularity of argument: if the influences of media transcend the will or undermine judgment, then our very questions have emanated from the state of mind we are examining. Our minds perform many different functions in many different ways, and yet we have to treat our own natures as essentially

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unchanged, and not susceptible to sudden wrenchings of purpose or nature. If objective knowledge were possible concerning the shaping of the mind by the products of art or by the sending of messages or by the contemplation of mimesis, then we would be admitting to a narrow version of the subject, narrowed to a mere pathology; anyone attempting such knowledge can only be asking questions too limited to suit the realities of human personality.

Moreover, the medium of television is itself not still, neither its specific content nor its overall nature or function. If the self is too complex and too rapidly moving a target for the type of research undertaken, the medium is itself too volatile and mercurial. The status of its images within a society and within each personality change constantly, partly along with the flow of the meta-discussion about the role of television. Victorian photographs, for example, exercised an impact that is different from that of the same medium today and will be different again in a year or in a different place. Disney's film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was subject to censor's cuts in its early years because the witches were thought, in some countries at least, to be too frightening for audiences of small children; our conceptions of childhood and of the susceptibility of children have shifted sufficiently for that particular form of stimulus to be deemed untroublesome in the 1980s, but does that mean that children have changed, that adults have changed, that films have altered in the intensity of their impact? The question is unknowable, the answer can only be unreachable and unconvincing.

The techniques of professional researchers have the same limitations (and advantages) as technologies of perception: they limit the perspective of those who use them and can also limit the perception unless the user takes account of their *essential* narrowness. The photographer's equipment enables him to observe minutely and to retain an impression of a flat surface; much can be learned with the use of the camera. It can even suggest the roundness and multi-dimensionality of the reality at which it points, but it only does so in a world of users who fully grasp, and accept, its limitations. Every generation of technologies of perception has left behind a newly reduced version of the human mind or limited image of the world. At the turn of the present century, people began conceptualizing the mind as a particularly complicated telephone switchboard; today we see it as a kind of computer. To the seventeenth century it was a kind

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of clock. Galileo's telescope enabled him to see mountains on the moon, and oceans on the planets; it enabled him to see how the physics of the heavens was a continuation of the physics of the earth, but it left him with a view of the earth and its inhabitants that was more mechanical than before. "It demechanized the sky but mechanized the earth." It took until Darwin's age for man to return, as it were, to become a part of nature. "What must be denied," wrote Lynn White in an earlier edition of *Daedalus,* "is that mathematics, measurement and quantification provide much insight into the deepest problems and experiences of our race: courage and cowardice, affection and hatred, generosity and greed, charm and repulsion, courtesy and boorishness, awe and mockery—and so on, without end. . . . About such matters we can only talk to each other, at length, carefully, trivially. We must talk patiently, weighing contradiction, balancing paradoxes, and not expecting to arrive at 'laws,' but rather rough consensus that draws on long experience and takes a long view at the road ahead."[21] But societies seem precisely to demand "laws," and there are social scientists always ready to help construct them. In the last decade of growing uncertainties, many of the social and other sciences have drawn away from monocausal explanations of phenomena, adopting methods of explanation that depend upon describing contexts: of family, class, constraint. True, we need some basis for making public policy where public decisions require to be taken, but we could more honestly and more appropriately decide that the basis of our decisions lies in some albeit shakily conceived moral philosophy, not in some crude and probably self-deceptive search for the security of proof. Of course, all societies have their taboos; everyone needs the safety of feeling that *something* has been prohibited. But surely any social science should set out to help us understand why we entertain those needs rather than covertly to help sustain them. Many of the violence researchers have become so nonplussed—not so much by the unsatisfactory nature of their own results, as by the puzzling unwillingness of others to accept them—that they have constructed vast statistical telescopes, as it were, each of them growing longer and more complex in its engineering than the one before. What some do not realize is that the "results" have been indelibly painted in advance at the end of the apparatus.

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ENDNOTES

[1]Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change,* 2 vols. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

[2]Elihu Katz and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communication* (New York: Free Press, 1960).

[3]See, for example, Bernard Berelson, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee, *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954).

[4]See Joseph T. Klapper, *The Effects of Mass Communication* (New York: Free Press, 1960).

[5]Raymond Rosenthal, *McLuhan Pro and Con* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1968).

[6]See Jonathan Miller, *McLuhan* (London: Fontana Modern Masters, 1971).

[7]For an extended analysis of the "gatekeeper" concept, see the writings of Kurt Lewin. For an account of the agenda-setting discussion, see M. McCombs, "Agenda-setting Research—A Bibliographical Essay," *Political Communications Review,* vol. 1, 1976, pp. 1–7.

[8]See, for example, the selection of studies in *Screen,* Jan.-Feb. 1983—a special edition on *Reflections on Television.*

[9]For a review of the many positions taken on this issue, see the symposium published as *The Media Crisis—A Continuing Challenge* (Washington, D.C.: The World Press Freedom Committee, 1982).

[10]Joshua Meyrowitz: *No Sense of Place: the Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behaviour* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 309.

[11]London *Times,* Nov. 9, 1984, p. 9.

[12]William A. Belson, *Television Violence and the Adolescent Boy* (Guildford, England: Saxon House, 1978).

[13]London *Times,* Nov. 17, 1984, p. 9.

[14]Barrie Gunter, *Dimensions of Television Violence* (Aldershot, England: Gower Publishing Co., 1985).

[15]London *Times,* Nov. 22, 1984, p. 13.

[16]London *Times,* Dec. 6, 1984, p. 17.

[17]London *Times,* Nov. 11, 1984, p. 14.

[18]See Michael Tracey and David Morrison, *Whitehouse: A Study in Moral Protest* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

[19]London *Daily Telegraph,* Dec. 11, 1984, p. 16.

[20]Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Printing Office, 1972). The update is: National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), *Television and Behavior: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the '80s* (Washington, D.C.: NIMH, 1982).

[21]Lynn White, Jr., "Science and the Sense of Self: the Medieval Background of a Modern Confrontation," *Daedalus,* Spring 1978, pp. 47–59.

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Michael Tracey

The Poisoned Chalice? International Television and the Idea of Dominance

In the last week of February 1985, 160 buyers from foreign television stations assembled in the Shakespeare Centre at Stratford upon Avon. They were attending the BBC's "Showcase," organized by BBC Enterprises to market the corporation's programs abroad. The popular purchases this year were a series based on the Agatha Christie figure Miss Marple; David Attenborough's *The Living Planet;* a drama based in Norway called *Maelstrom;* and the Shakespeare cycle. A popular comedy program about the British civil service, *Yes Minister,* has been sold to thirty-seven countries including Sri Lanka, Saudi Arabia, Yugoslavia, and Libya. Sales of this program to the Eastern bloc were nonexistent. East European countries did, however, like *Allo Allo,* a comedy set in Nazi-occupied France. The German buyers at Stratford declined to buy this on the grounds that "it would not travel well," even though they did buy the brilliant, if curious, *Fawlty Towers.* As any fan of this knows, one of the show's key figures is the Spanish waiter Manuel. The Spanish buyer was told that, in fact, Manuel was Mexican, and he duly obliged by buying the series.

Looked at from one angle, this gathering was no more than a way for the world's television channels to buy some rather good programs very cheaply. From another point of view, however, here begins the insidious influence of North Atlantic culture over the rest of the

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world. Along with Basil Fawlty and Manuel, Sir Humphrey and Jim Hacker of the ministry, the detective as dame (in a traditional English sense, not that imported sense), the dramas of a Norwegian fjord, the Bard and all his works, and the many other products of the BBC, flow values that first enter and then slowly influence cultures that would be better off without them.

What can we say about television as a process of international cultural domination? What can we say about the idea of dominance? What can we say about why American programs are so much more "popular" than those of other countries? What specific influences can we pinpoint? What grasp do we have of the relationship between the international distribution of television programs and the shaping of individual lives and whole cultures? What can we say even about the distribution of television programs? The answer to all these questions is: not very much.

Let me begin with that very basic final question: what do we know about the "surface" structure of the international distribution of television programs? To answer that, it is necessary to recapitulate the findings of the research organized on behalf of UNESCO by Tapio Varis.[1] This study, which covered some sixty-nine countries, was an update of a similar survey completed a decade before. Varis found few overall changes since 1973 in the pattern of program flow, but did indicate a trend toward greater regional exchanges along with the continued dominance of a few exporting countries.

The 1972–73 study showed, first, that there existed, in effect, a one-way flow of TV programs internationally, from the North Atlantic basin to the rest of the world, and, second, that entertainment dominates that flow. At the beginning of the seventies, there were 273 million TV receivers in the world and an estimated audience of 883,900,000. These numbers have since grown considerably, though the evidence that has so far been made available by Varis gives no update on the overall figures. Let us just accept that there are an awful lot of TVs in the world, and an awful lot of people watching them. With that, most of us can agree.

For his research for UNESCO, Varis used as a sample the two weeks from January 31 to February 13, 1983. Table 1 summarizes the flow of imported programming world-wide.

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Table 1 Percentage of imported television programs in 1973, 1983, and prime-time 1983 (measured in programming hours).

Country & broadcasting institution	% of imported programming 1973	1983	1983, prime time
NORTH AMERICA			
Canada/CBC	34	32	24
Canada/RC	46	38	31
United States/commercial	1	2	2
United States/educational	2		
LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN			
Argentina/Canal 9	10	49	53
Brazil	—	30	23
Chile	55	—	—
Colombia	34	—	—
Cuba	—	24	9
Dominican Republic	50	—	—
Ecuador	—	66	70
Guatemala	84	—	—
Mexico	39	34	44
Uruguay	62	—	—
Venezuela	—	38	42
WESTERN EUROPE			
Austria	—	43	61
Belgium/BRT	—	28	33
Belgium/RTBF	—	29	28
Denmark	—	46	32
Federal Republic of Germany/ARD	23	13	7
Federal Republic of Germany/ZDF	30	23	23
Federal Republic of Germany/regional	—	24	—
Finland	40	37	37
France	9	17	17
Greece	—	39	—
Iceland	67	66	66
Ireland	54	57	58
Italy	13	18	19
Netherlands	23	25	24
Norway	39	30	28
Portugal	35	39	—

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Country & broadcasting institution	% of imported programming 1973	1983	1983, prime time
Spain	—	33	35
Spain/EIT.B regional	—	74	—
Sweden	33	35	28
Turkey	—	36	49
United Kingdom/BBC	12	15	21
United Kingdom/ITV	13	14	20
United Kingdom/channel 4	—	26	15
EASTERN EUROPE AND SOVIET UNION			
Bulgaria	45	27	21
German Democratic Republic	26	30	39
Czechoslovakia	—	24	25
Hungary	24	26	35
Poland	17	—	—
Romania	27	—	—
Soviet Union	5	8	18
Yugoslavia	27	29	22
ASIA AND THE PACIFIC			
Australia	57	44	46
Brunei	—	60	28
People's Republic of China	1	8	—
Hong Kong/Asia TV Chinese	31	24	16
Hong Kong/Asia TV English	40	64	72
Hong Kong Asia TV Ltd.	—	27	9
India/Calcutta	—	3	6
India/Delhi	—	11	10
Japan/NHK educ.	1	—	—
Japan/comm.	10	—	—
Rep. of Korea/Tong-Yang	31	—	—
Rep. of Korea/Munhwa TV	—	16	0
Malaysia	71	54	31
New Zealand/one	75	72	64
New Zealand/two	75	75	66
Pakistan	35	16	12
Philippines	29	12	20
Philippines/Metro Manila	—	40	—
Singapore/channel 8	78	55	70

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Singapore/channel 5	78	70	66
Sri Lanka	—	24	22
Thailand	18	—	—
Vietnam	—	34	—
NEAR EAST AND ARAB COUNTRIES			
Algeria	—	55	55
Egypt	41	35	41
Israel	55	—	—
Kuwait	56	—	—
Lebanon	40	—	—
Saudi-Arabia/Riyadh TV	31	—	—
Saudi-Arabia/Aramcu TV	100	—	—
Syria	—	33	35
Tunisia	—	55	35
People's Republic of Yemen	57	47	—
AFRICA			
Ghana	27	—	—
Kenya	—	37	60
Nigeria	63	40	—
Republic of South Africa	—	29	31
Uganda	19	38	38
Zambia	64	—	—
Zimbabwe	—	61	—

SOURCE: from "The International Flow of Television Programs" by Tapio Varis, in the *Journal of Communication*, vol. 34 no. 1. © 1984 by the Annenberg School of Communications. All rights reserved.

Varis's analysis is, without doubt, the best guide we have to the general distribution of television around the world. Overall, imported programs average one-third or more of total programming. The United States imports little—only about 2 percent of its total television output, mainly from Great Britain, Mexico, and Latin America. In Canada, the vast percentage of the material imported is from the United States. In Latin America, entertainment dominated all the TV programming studied, accounting for about 50 percent of total transmission time. Most of these entertainment programs are imported: 75 percent from the U.S.; 12 percent from Latin America; a small percent from Europe.

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In Western Europe, there are important differences among countries. Overall, 30 percent of television programming is imported. Forty-four percent of the material is imported from the U.S., with U.S. programs accounting for 10 percent of total transmission time in Europe; sixteen percent is imported from the United Kingdom; 5 to 10 percent from Germany and France; 3 percent from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

In the USSR, 14 percent of entertainment programs are imported. Eastern Europe imported programs from twenty-six countries, 43 percent from other Eastern European countries and 57 percent from outside that area. Twenty-one percent came from the Soviet Union.

In Asia and the Pacific, 36 percent of all television programs are imported, but the variations among countries are enormous, ranging from 75 percent for New Zealand's Channel 2, to 3 percent for a Calcutta station. The U.S. and U.K. are the main source of programs; followed by Japan, with children's programs, documentaries, and movies; and India, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, with films. China produces almost all its own TV, taking just a little educational and news material from the United Kingdom.

In the Arab countries, 42 percent of TV is imported: one-third comes from other Arab states; 32 percent of non-Arabic imported programs come from the United States. In Egypt, 54.5 percent of imported programs are from the United States. Of the rest of non-Arabic imported programs, France provides 13 percent; the U.K., Japan, and Germany 5 to 7 percent each; the USSR less than 3 percent; and other socialist countries about 1 percent. Of the Arab countries, the most important source of imports is the United Arab Emirates (10 percent of imported programs), followed by Egypt (6 percent), Saudi Arabia (4 percent), and Kuwait (4 percent).

In Africa, about 40 percent of programs are imported, although there are quite wide differences among countries: Zimbabwe, for example, imports about 61 percent of its television. Of the imported material, 50 percent comes from the U.S., 25 percent from Germany, and the rest from Western Europe. In South Africa, 30 percent of programs are imported: 54 percent from the U.S., 30 percent from the U.K., 9 percent from France, 5 percent from Austria, and 3 percent from Canada. Seventy percent of this programming is entertainment.

At a global level, most imported programs originate in the U.S. and, to a lesser extent, Western Europe and Japan. The flow is mainly of

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programs of a recreational kind—light entertainments, movies, and sports. In both Western and Eastern Europe, more than 40 percent of imported programs originate within other countries in the region. In both regions, the superpowers predominate: the U.S. provides 40 percent of West European imports while the USSR provides 20 percent of East European imports.

The most notable increase in regional exchange over the past ten years has occurred among the Arabs, with one-third of imports originating within the region, and among Latin American countries where the figure for regional exchange is 10 percent.

The very general picture of TV flows described by Varis is, however, not a one-way street; rather, there are a number of main thoroughfares, with a series of not unimportant smaller roads. In this sense, his description parallels that of the distribution of news. What is clear is that television as an international communication system is far more complex than is sometimes assumed. We must allow for flows within flows, patterns of distribution that do not fit into the familiar and simplistic model that shows total domination of international television by the United States. Even when we simply count which programs are going where, that idea does not hold true. There are alternative sets of influences and movement within Latin America, within Europe, within Asia, within the Gulf States, within the Pacific basin: one cannot pretend these do not exist.

In assessing the pattern of program distribution, one must also consider video, a technology that has been largely absent from the general debate about international television, and yet which is becoming more and more important. At the end of 1983, there were an estimated 40 million VCRs (videocassette recorders) in the world, with a growth rate much faster than that of TV.

The Gulf States, for example, are an important area for the use of videocassette recorders to watch television and films from other countries.[2] The penetration rate of VCRs in Saudi Arabia is about 85 percent of homes with televisions. A 1981 study that surveyed 120 people showed that they *all* had VCRs; a survey conducted in the Red Sea city of Jidda showed that 19 percent of all homes had *two* machines.

There are basically two types of material available on videotape. The first includes large quantities of TV Westerns and feature films. At the time of Douglas Boyd's research, the latest episodes of *Hill*

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Street Blues, St. Elsewhere, The A-Team, as well as such movies as *E.T.,* and *Terms of Endearment,* were readily available. All of these were pirated. Similarly, every evening's total BBC output is taped and flown to the Middle East the following morning in a private plane. Pornographic material is acquired from London, Paris, and Frankfurt. There are also Arab television programs and films, obtained mainly from Egypt. As one observer noted: "In the tumultuous arena of Arab politics, the soaps are a soft-sell commercial for Egyptian values, and thereby a vehicle for Egyptian influence. They are a reminder to the Arabs that even when Egypt's political course is in disrepute, Egypt is still number one among the Arab states."[3]

The success and influence of Egyptian television follows in the wake of the success of its films, which "paved the way . . . by promoting the faces of its stars, the voices of its singers and the tales of its writers in every Arab city and town. Even more important, it spread a familiarity with Egypt's dialect. Thanks to the movies, the Arabic spoken by the Egyptians has come to dominate a language spoken in a hundred different ways in the Middle East. This dominance now virtually precludes any other Arab country from successfully establishing an entertainment industry of its own." An Egyptian TV producer observed: "The rich markets for state TV are in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, and [Egyptian TV] will not produce anything that will alienate the Saudis. The Saudis only want things that could have been shown in the Middle Ages. Like all Arab governments, they want to promote the status quo. So that is what we give them."[4]

In many Asian societies, governments are becoming worried that the use of VCRs is undermining development goals. For example, in Malaysia 75 percent of the viewers of VCR tapes are the Malaysian Chinese population. The government is trying to weld together a number of cultures through the use of a national language, Bahasa Malaysia, but the Chinese prefer Chinese-language videotapes from Hong Kong to the Bahasa Malaysia–dominated TV service, a fact that is less than pleasing to the authorities. In 1982, the information minister, Adib Adam, expressed his fears that government messages were not reaching the people, and that the loss of the TV audience to video might "hamper government efforts to disseminate national aspirations and values and channel information to the people." In an article in the Malaysian *Star,* on June 21, 1983, he warned that

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videotapes could expose people to policies contrary to government policies and national culture, hurt television news and information, and hinder the government's efforts to foster racial harmony. The counter-accusation, however, was one universally used when an audience begins to drift away: TV is boring. There have recently been efforts to make television more appealing by importing more Western material—a solution that is itself out of step with the ambitions of the Malaysian government for development and nation building. In short, the situation was no more than one version of that global problem in which, when given free choices, populations *tend* (a word I here use carefully and deliberately) to reject marching to the heights of a glorious and enriched future nation, in favor of heading to the playground.[5]

Similarly in Indonesia, the reaction to the TV service has been to turn more and more to watching television programs and films on VCR. In Islamic cultures, the VCR is playing havoc with traditional values and morals. Middle-class Indians are also using VCRs extensively, watching a good deal of U.S. material. Table 2, next page, outlines in more detail the spread of TV sets and VCRs in the various societies (these figures should be regarded as rather tentative).

One final point needs to be addressed in this discussion of the parameters of TV as an international process: the use, and planned use, of satellites to distribute television around the world. In July of last year, the magazine *Asian Broadcasting* ran a cover picture of the cargo bay of the space shuttle; the story headline read, "Satellites: Everybody Wants One." The theory is that direct broadcast satellite (DBS) systems are ideal for countries that are eager to provide their people with television and telecommunications systems without going to the expense and effort of building land-based networks of cables, transmitters, and microwave links. Behind that thesis lies the dangerous notion that the application of such technologies can enhance ambitions of boosting industrial growth and socioeconomic development. The other immediate advantage of DBS in the eyes of developing societies is the ability to multiplex, or split, the sound signals to serve a nation that may be geopolitically a single entity, but which in linguistic and cultural terms is no more than an aggregate of different groups. India and China are obvious examples. In India, the main objective of the satellite program is to harness spacecraft technology for the transmission of TV broadcasts designed to aid the

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Table 2 Estimates of VCR ownership in selected Third World countries

Country	TV sets (thousands)	VCRs (thousands)
CENTRAL AMERICA		
Panama	222	180
SOUTH AMERICA		
Argentina	6500	75
Brazil	19,259	700
Chile	2000	60
Colombia	2500	275
Ecuador	410	30
Peru	855	150
Venezuela	2800	450
ASIA		
India	1769	500
MIDDLE EAST		
Bahrain	110	48
Iran	2085	285
Iraq	525	100
Jordan	200.5	34
Kuwait	555	375
Lebanon	458.7	50
Oman	46	20
Qatar	350	60
Saudi Arabia	838.6	808
United Arab Emir.	100	75
FAR EAST		
Malaysia	1107	400
Philippines	954.9	330
Thailand	2343	35

SOURCE: from C. Ogan, "Cultural Imperialism by Invitation," *Media Development*, 1/1985, pp. 2–4.

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country's development program. India's involvement began with the launching of its Satellite Instructional Television Experiment in August 1975. After an initial failure in 1982, with a new satellite INSAT-1A, a successful satellite INSAT-1B was launched in August 1983. This now transmits TV programs directly to augmented sets, as well as via a network of ground-based receivers. India expected to reach 70 percent of its population by the middle of 1985. It was estimated that by the end of 1984 there would be eight thousand direct-reception sets. The Indian government also plans to build four rebroadcast transmitters. By the late 1980s, India will have its new proto-INSAT system, with a significant TV component.

Last year, China formed the China National Satellite Corporation under the Ministry of Radio and TV, the purpose of which was to design and develop a TV reception system using domestic and imported technology. China already has an agreement with the German firm MBB to acquire a DBS system. The reason is simple: only one-third of China's one billion population can currently receive TV coverage through ground systems. The government plans to install three thousand reception and rebroadcast stations when the DBS goes up in 1986. An additional thirty thousand receive-only stations will go on stream before 1990 to reach 90 percent of the population.

South Korea is slowly examining the possibility of establishing a DBS system that would provide three TV channels and four thousand telephone circuits. Indonesia was the first Asian country to develop its own domestic satellite system, Palapa, which went into operation in mid-1976 to provide telephone, telex, and TV links for three thousand islands scattered over five thousand kilometers of ocean. A second-generation Palapa system has now been developed, shared with Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines. Thailand, mightily impressed by Palapa, has now decided to develop its own system.

In the Middle East, the development by the Arab League, a consortium of twenty-one countries, of the Arabsat, which is capable of eight TV channels for both community sets and direct receivers, indicates that region's commitment to this particular form of TV transmission. Forty ground receiving stations are now being built at a cost of $150 million. Pakistan is examining the possibilities of

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establishing its own direct television and communications satellites by the end of the decade.

And so it goes. I have not even touched on the major developments by the industrial societies to establish DBS systems. Yet it is quite clear that if one were to write this article a decade hence, programs, video, and DBS would have to be at the very forefront of the description and analysis. These are probably the two technologies that will ultimately shape the future structure of international television.

Whatever the complexities, it would be ludicrous to deny that there are distortions in the distribution pattern of communications around the globe. On so much we can all agree. What is less evident is that these patterns necessarily imply structures of dominance. In other words, we cannot take as given the nature of the social experience which is implied by the distribution of, for example, American television around the world. We cannot take as unproblematic the idea of national culture nor its alleged transformation under the impact of imported programs. Writing from within the confines of Britain in 1985, I would find it difficult even to delineate the parameters of my own national culture. Whose culture is it: that of Mrs. Thatcher or the militant miners' leader, Arthur Scargill; the south or the north; the rioting football fan or the Sunday cricketer? If a culture is to be found in shared symbols, then what symbols hold sway in these islands anymore, if indeed they ever did? Precious few, I fear, and getting fewer by the day.

A 1953 UNESCO publication *(TV, A World Survey)* made the statement: "International cooperation is beginning to open up new fields for television and it is increasingly recognized how effective it can be to bring about greater awareness about each other among nations differing in language and character." The same report spoke of how television could make the "treasures of man's civilization" available, and of TV as a means of "global peace and understanding." Bliss was it in that dawn. The view of global television now espoused within the chambers of UNESCO is that it is a distinctly poisoned chalice.

By 1972, the General Conference of UNESCO was suggesting that there was a danger that the mass media could become vehicles for "the domination of world public opinion or a source of moral and cultural pollution," and that the one-way flow of television from a small number of countries threatened "the cultural values of most of

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the remaining countries." In 1973, at the meeting of the heads of state of non-aligned countries, there were calls for the "reorganization of existing communication channels which are the legacy of the colonial past, and which have hampered free, direct and fast communication between them." It was added that "cultural alienation and imported civilization, imposed imperialism and colonialism, should be countered by . . . a constant and determined recourse to the social and cultural values of the population which define them as a sovereign people."

And so on, as large parts of the international community have become anxious about the adverse effects of foreign television on their countries. This is not just true of the developing countries; many important and influential voices can be heard throughout Europe expressing concern over the implications of "foreign" television. It is admittedly not an anxiety overly present in American society—which in terms of the penetration of anything foreign and visual remains in a state of *virgo intacto*. International television and cultural dominance have, however, become an important issue of international politics. On that agenda, it is taken as given by most societies that adverse effects do follow from their populations' cultural appetites, as expressed in the TV they watch.

Equally influential sections of the academic community have argued vociferously about the alleged powerful influences of international television. Cees Hamelink, for example, in his most recent book,[7] speaks of how in recent years the delicate process by which developing societies evolve and adapt is being increasingly threatened by the advanced industrial states' large-scale export of cultural systems to Third World countries. As a result, he suggests, the survival of autonomous cultural systems in many areas of the Third World is very much in question. He adds: "It is the argument of this study that cultural autonomy is essential for a process of independent development. However, cultural autonomy is virtually impossible in a system which attempts to integrate the weak and poor countries in a global community that serves best the interests of only the rich and powerful. This autonomy has to be secured through the formulation and implementation of national policies based on international *dissociation* which encourage self-reliant development and the cooperation of developing countries among themselves."

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The general effect he suggests, however, is for cultural "synchronization"—the eradication of diversity, and its replacement with "a single global culture" in which the cultural traffic is overwhelmingly one way, with the result that the "whole process of social inventiveness and cultural creativity is thrown into confusion or is definitely destroyed. Unique dimensions in the spectrum of human values, which have evolved over centuries, rapidly disappear."

Hamelink offers little in the way of substantial or rigorous evidence to support his case. In those areas where he draws on a significant body of research, however, he handles the evidence in a curious way. For example, in pointing out that international television flow consists of news as well as entertainment, he states: "The role of international news in transferring values should not be underestimated. The selection of news by the few large international news agencies undoubtedly reflects the values of metropolitan countries. Most developing countries are dependent on this choice for their information on events outside their country. They receive international news as well as news about themselves via the news centres in New York, Paris, or London." He then quotes an unnamed government official: "In the absence of a national news agency in Thailand, India receives only the American or British version of events in that country. How that keeps Thailand and India from understanding each other more deeply and readily is for those who know how to judge."[8]

The most recent and comprehensive research now available presents a much more complicated picture—one, moreover, that Hamelink ignores. At the end of the 1970s, UNESCO and the International Association for Mass Communication Research (IAMCR) sponsored a report on an international study of news coverage by press, radio, and TV in twenty-nine countries. The author of the main report (the result of work by several different but coordinated research teams) notes: "If ever it was clear that good evidence doesn't prove a case, that is true of the international research project *The World of the News* . . . ."[9]

The study involved thirteen teams in different countries, plus the accumulation of information from a range of other countries. Covering broadcasting and the press, it examined twenty-nine media systems in all. What was perhaps most notable about the findings of the limited quantitative analysis was that, although the participating

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nations reflected different levels of development and a variety of political perspectives, the overall pattern of attention paid to certain kinds of events was remarkably similar. While politics dominated international news everywhere, the study also revealed the prominence of regionalism. Every national system devoted most attention to people and events within its immediate geographical region. This focus characterized between 23 and 63 percent of all international news in every system. Thus, Nigeria was most concerned about African affairs and African actors, Argentina featured Latin American news, and so on.

The final report of the study states that there are many questions left unanswered, but that "the validity of our quantitative findings is supported by and in turn reverberates the general findings of many other such studies conducted over the past decade."[10] For example, a look at the geographic emphasis of international news from the data of forty-two countries (culled from ten separate empirical studies) reveals a strong, consistent, and simple pattern. Regional news is emphasized in the media of all countries. After the dominance of one's own region comes news from North America and Western Europe; the "invisible" parts of the world are Eastern Europe and the developing world.

One reviewer of the report observes: "Let us begin by noting what this study does *not* show. It does not show that Western media and news agencies ignore the Third World. It does not show that they single out the Third World for unfair negative coverage. It does not show that they see the Third World through a filter of cultural bias. It does not show that the Third World media are hostage to a Western news monopoly. It does not show that the socialist and Third World media systems that claim to represent an alternative model operate much differently than their Western counterparts."[11]

A rule that seems to emerge is that the less developed a nation, the more its media use geographically proximate stories. Thus, foreign news from the immediate geographic region is 26 percent in the U.S., 56 percent in the Ivory Coast, and 63 percent in Malaysia. Assertions that the Western media and news agencies ignore the Third World are simply untrue. About a third of foreign news stories in northern media systems originate in the Third World; in the Third World, about 60 to 75 percent of all foreign news is from other Third World countries. The big gaps in world news are not the absence of Third

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World news in the Western media, but news about Eastern Europe in all other areas of the world and non-regional Third World news within the Third World.

What emerges from what is probably the most detailed piece of research on international news flow is that many of the charges against the Western media and news services lack evidence to support them; that the sameness among media of very different political systems argues against the theory of cultural imperialism; and that much of the rhetoric addresses outdated questions. Stevenson concludes: "Too much of the NWIO [New World Information Order] debate has focused on assertions that were probably never true and certainly are no longer true. This study helps clear the air of the pseudo debate." The study also potentially provides a very important perspective on the key suppositions that have underlain the patterns and consequences of other forms of international communications, such as the distribution of television programs.

Herb Schiller has also become well known as a theorist of communication as cultural domination. In his first and most influential work, *Mass Communications an American Empire* (1969), he states: "Mass communications are now a pillar of the emergent imperial society. Messages 'made in America' radiate across the globe and serve as the ganglia of national power and expansionism. The ideological images of 'have not' states are increasingly in the custody of American informational media. National authority over attitude creation and opinion formation in the developing world has weakened and is being relinquished to powerful external forces. . . . Everywhere local culture is facing submersion from the mass-produced outpourings of commercial broadcasting."

Fourteen years later, the tune remained essentially the same. In a paper on "Electronic Information Flows: New Basis for Global Domination," Schiller develops, in a somewhat polemical manner, his analysis of the evolving political economy of the industrial societies and the enormous power of a small number of multinational corporations. Nothing wrong with all that, apart from the occasional touch of hyperbole (at one point he talks of the welfare state as "already mostly a memory"—this, a set of institutions that take up a huge part of the gross domestic product!). Where I part from Schiller's analysis is when he slips into such phrases as "a vast extension in cultural control and domination to say nothing of

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economic and political mastery" and "saturating the cultural space of the nation."[12] Let me ask again: what does that mean, and, at the risk of being accused of outrageous positivism, where's the evidence? Certainly, he provides none.

What, then, about the idea of *domination?* A whole library of works exists on cross-national influences, trans-border data flow, the economics of cultural imperialism, TV flows, and so on. Hamelink and Schiller are just two of the more prominent members of an extensive school of thought.[13] Each tends to be loaded with sets of assumptions about cultural influences, about meanings and the shaping of consciousness. Yet each equally tends to hold those views in the abstract, outside of any grasp of their place within the life of a society. As the late Ithiel de Sola Pool observed: "There is, in fact, remarkably little research of any kind on international communication. There is a great deal of essay writing about it. But by research I mean studies in which data is collected to establish or refute some general proposition. . . . The two topics regarding international communication that have been most extensively studied, and very badly, I must say, are the balance in the flow of communication among countries, and the cultural biases in what flows. These are topics on which there have been a few empirical studies, though by far the great bulk of that literature consists of polemical essays unenlightened by facts."[14]

Look, for example, at a book such as *National Sovereignty and International Communication* edited by Schiller and Nordenstreng in 1979, which contains little that is based on traditional social science research studies. It offers little or no empirical or historical analysis, and as Pool puts it: "What does exist is not serious social research, but assertions wrapped in rabid tracts full of ideology and with the occasional numbers out of context."[15]

Since its first appearance on American television in 1978 and its subsequent export to many foreign countries, *Dallas* has become the exemplar of the global influence of American television, the apparent embodiment of the theory of cultural imperialism, a metaphor for an entire argument. Clearly, at one level *Dallas* fits the stereotype: it is available in many different countries and is always sold at a lower price than any home-produced equivalent. What has been almost totally ignored, however, is the relationship between the program and the various audiences that, for whatever reasons, in whatever

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circumstances, with whatever consequences, actually sit down and watch it. Any exploration at that level, no matter how cursory, provides some important qualifications to the imperialism thesis. For example, in most countries *Dallas* is not as popular as home-produced soaps, and it is completely ignored in countries as diverse as Brazil and Japan, which nevertheless have well-established and highly popular domestic dramas as part of their main TV offerings. In New Zealand, other kinds of shows from other countries are more popular than *Dallas* and its ilk. While a number of researchers *have* recognized the need to understand the different audience responses to programs such as *Dallas*—e.g., Elihu Katz and Tamar Liebes in Israel, Jean Bianchi in France, David Morley and Dorothy Hobson in Britain[16]—these efforts have, to date, unfortunately been inhibited by a lack of real resources.

It is, in fact, simply untrue to say that imported television programs, from the U.S. or other metropolitan countries, always have a dominant presence within an indigenous television culture. Certainly they do not always attract larger audiences than homemade programs, nor do they always threaten national production.

In Brazil, for example, which is the sixth biggest television market in the world, the level of imported television material *fell* by 32 percent between 1973 and 1982, largely due to the activities of TV Globo, which captures between 60 and 80 percent of the television audience. Between 5:30 PM and 11:00 PM, 84 percent of the programs offered are in-house productions. In August 1983, the top ten programs were all Globo productions, including three "telenovellas." As Richard Paterson points out, in Brazil one sees "a television devoted to national culture. TV Globo has fully utilized the possibilities created by these circumstances to develop a different sort of television. The development of an indigenous television puts into question Schiller's thesis about the inevitability of traditional drama and folk music retreating before the likes of Peyton Place and Bonanza."[17]

Dallas, by the way, in 1982 occupied 69th position in the Brazilian ratings and 109th in Mexico.[18] In the very different context of Britain, however, while successful, it has never seriously challenged the domestically produced dramas *Coronation Street, Crossroads,* and *Emmerdale Farm.* Another illustration of how indigenous populations do not respond to imported material in stereotypical ways

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can be seen in South Africa. There, TV1 carries such imports as *Dallas* and *The A-Team,* with vernacular services on TV2 and TV3. In December 1983, however, Bophuthatswana Television, broadcasting from the capital of Mmabatho, began to broadcast in English but with increasing amounts of material of a local nature in Setswana. More and more of the black population of South Africa turns to this channel. Indeed, the success has been so great that President Mpepha of the tiny republic of Venda has now announced that he wants his own television service, Radio Television Thohoyandau.[19]

In Singapore, where the government's Singapore Broadcasting Corporation runs three channels broadcasting in English, Mandarin, Tamil, and Malay, and where 60 percent of the programs are English-language (the bulk of which are imported), Chinese programs, particularly from Hong Kong, are consistently the most popular. In Ireland, which imports 65 percent of its total output and where the BBC and ITV are readily available to most of the population, the most popular programs for many years have been *The Late, Late Show* on Saturdays, hosted by Gay Byrne, followed by the home-produced drama series *The Riordans, Bracken,* and *Glenroe.* In countries such as New Zealand and Sweden, where the local broadcasting services face enormous problems that necessitate the importation of foreign television, home-grown programs nevertheless compete in popularity. In New Zealand, in fact, there is evidence that the bulk of the population actively dislikes the American shows they see on their screens. In Zimbabwe in 1982, locally produced programs such as *The Mukadda Family* had much higher ratings than the imported *Dallas, Dynasty,* and *Falcon Crest.* One author writing about television in Bangladesh observed: "Imported programmes are popular, but do not dominate BTV. In the 1980s some would say that the *Incredible Hulk* does sit uneasily between *Shilpo-O-Shahilya* [a series on art and literature] and *Jalsa* [a programme on classical music]. *Dallas, Charlie's Angels* and *Chips* are cheaper for BTV to transmit than any local dramas—but local productions challenge them in a way few outsiders would believe possible."[20]

One could go on. This is not to say that imported programs are *not* an important part of the total structure of many countries' broadcasting, nor, indeed, that in some cases they are not very popular. It is merely to observe that even a limited glance at the available evidence—such as it is—about the most simple facts of television

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viewing, indicates that the picture of the role of television in any society is far more complex than is often allowed for. As far as we can tell, audiences discriminate and tend to prefer home-produced television, rather than slavishly pursuing imported programs.

The point of this Cook's tour, then, is actually quite simple: it is to show that a rather more discrete, subtle, and empirical approach is necessary before we can begin to understand the actual experience of the flow of international television, and thus the notion of television dominance. The question this in turn raises is: what model can best explain cultural influences in the lives of a given society, and where can we find the methodology to test that model?

The problem with the old model is that it took a not very good inventory and pretended it was an analysis. One can say nothing of influences, of how those programs engage with a society simply on the basis of a surface description; and yet that is all we have tended to have so far. As a former colleague of mine quite rightly argued:

> The development of theories about the ill effects of the importation of American television programmes depends on the measuring devices of imports/exports and the income earned from such sales for their substantiation. Unfortunately these measures, although useful, do not focus on the size and responses of the audiences who eventually see such programmes. There is an assumption that American TV imports do have an impact wherever and whenever they are shown, but actual investigation (or verification) of this seldom occurs. Much of the evidence that is offered is merely anecdotal or circumstantial. Observations of New Guinean tribesmen clustered around a set in the sweltering jungle watching *Bonanza* or of Algerian nomads watching *Dallas* in the heat of the desert, are often offered as sufficient proof.[21]

On the basis of what we know—*really* know as opposed to imagine we know—what then can be said about the notion of dominance by international television? What is the argument? What is the problem? Let me begin not with some humble, underdeveloped, exploited nation, but with a huge, wealthy, powerful one: Canada. Canada apparently has one overwhelming problem when it comes to the culture of television, and that is its proximity to an even more powerful, wealthy, and huge society, the United States. In a recent account of the development of cable TV in Canada, Tim Hollins made the following point:

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Over 80 percent of the Canadian population lives within one hundred miles of the American border, and the realities of this situation have had a greater impact than somewhat abstract cultural aspirations. Although regulation has been imposed to promote both Canadian broadcasting and production, the Canadians themselves have consistently demonstrated a strong interest, even a preference for material from the United States. Consequently, the Government has had to find a path between accepting the reality of the U.S. cultural imperialism and forcing a Canadian cultural chauvinism which appears antithetical to the rights and wishes of its own citizens.[22]

The first, and rather tricky, problem for government leaders, intellectuals, reformers, and political evangelists (who may also be academics) around the globe is that, as Hollins suggests about Canada, populations do have this unfortunate habit of choosing television programs that are not "good" for them. Indeed, one might construct the first law of international communications: that which is bad for them, they *will* insist on watching.

I am, you will detect, a touch less worried than some about this situation—described in endless meetings of UNESCO and kindred bodies, and enough books and articles to threaten the existence of tropical rain forests—partly because I suspect that assumptions about the extent of exposure to "foreign" material are overstated, and mainly because I believe that the assumptions about their "effects" are certainly overstated, and devoid of decent evidence and good theory. It is difficult, for example, to take too seriously the assumptions behind a phrase such as "the Dallas-drugged viewers," which I saw used recently in the context of a discussion of Italian television. Nor the sentiment, however well meaning, in this observation: "For the survival and development of important human values, the study of intercultural communication may be one of the critical areas of communication research. One has only to witness *Kojak* and *Starsky and Hutch* bouncing off satellites *into the intimacy of minds and homes* [my emphasis] in cultures of India and Thailand to realize this."

Such, however, is the power of the orthodoxy on these matters that I write these words with a feeling of guilt, a certain trepidation in waiting for the howls of scorn that one can doubt something so self-evident. Indeed, it seems to me that the Western writer, from within the comfort of his wealth, faces a difficult problem in

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addressing objectively issues of dominance and cultural imperialism. On the one hand, he is in danger of either assuming uncritically the notions and sentiments uttered by Third World leaders and their Western acolytes out of a wish for them to be right. On the other hand, if he challenges those arguments, questions them, suggests that maybe they are not totally correct, that perhaps they are self-interested or just plain innocently wrong, he is immediately open to the accusation of having a mealy-mouthed, uncaring attitude towards the problems of developing societies. Yet, in all honesty, one has to say that it is possible that, within the realms of international communications, a poverty of thought has emerged to match the real poverty of resources that afflicts developing societies.

In seeking to understand international television, then, one has to ask: What evidence is there? What can we say? What do we know? In researching this article, I constantly returned to these questions and to the simple statement: "It is claimed that this mass of material coming in from outside is both erasing traditional cultures and inhibiting the emergence of authentic cultural changes. There is no clear evidence that this is in fact happening, nor indeed any that it is not."[23] In the heart of darkness, which is the image offered by the many views of the adverse consequences of imported television, there is a vacuum: an absence of evidence and good theory. In this context, I was struck by a comment made by Wilbur Schramm in an interesting article called "The Unique Perspective of Communication: A Retrospective Review."[24] He was saying, or at least he seemed to me to be saying, that for all its effort, all its worth, over decades communication research really had not *said* very much. He asked, "Has it produced a central, interrelated body of theory on which the practitioners of a discipline can build and unify their thinking?" Good question. And the correct answer: "I am afraid that it has not. . . . In a similar vein, we must ask whether we have produced only *ingredients* of communication theory. Are the pieces of a general theory of communication lying around us ready to be assembled? Or, for some reason, is a central theory of communication beyond our capability at this time?"

The question to pose is not what is the nature of cultural domination or imperialism, with all the assumptions of intellectual, psychological, and emotional influence. The real question is why such simple, impressionistic analyses have come to hold such sway in the

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debate about the character of communications in international as well as domestic life. Why have such analyses—paradoxically dripping with human concern—become so divorced from any human contact?

There is a marvelous little article by Irene Penacchioni about the viewing of popular television in poverty-ridden northeast Brazil.[25] It is a fine example of the view that the role and use of television ought to be viewed ethnographically from *within* a culture, rather than condescendingly from without. She pulls no punches: "In my opinion . . . the investigations into television which are carried out by sociology are informed by the amused condescensions of intellectuals towards mass culture and by their dark fear of the alleged power of images. . . . Intellectuals use the written word to protect themselves from television as though it were a cross to protect them from vampires." She writes of the popularity of the telenovella with the local people:

> It is important to understand the pleasure of following a fiction from day to day over a long period of time; pleasures associated with the "to be continued," of curiosity and expectation about the unpredictable, which will make itself heard again. What next? What will happen to our hero? The genealogy of pleasure, this joy related to the telenovella, has to be sought in the occidental history of folk poetry. . . . Television seems to correspond to a cyclical and everyday representation of time as found in folk poetry. . . . The phenomenon of television cannot be comprehended here without a systematic investigation of the cultural context, and its different aspects, in the Northeast of Brazil.

One of the moments she describes is of a group of people sitting around a TV set in the town square, not just watching telenovellas, but laughing uproariously at the exploits of Charlie Chaplin. When I read this, another very familiar image came to my mind.

I was born in a working-class community called Oldham, in the north of England. Before the First World War, Oldham produced most of the world's spun cotton. It is a place of mills and chimneys, and I was born and raised in one of the areas of housing—called St. Mary's—built to serve those mills. I recently heard a record by a local group of folk singers called the Oldham Tinkers, and one track is about Charlie Chaplin. This song was apparently very popular with local children in the years immediately after the First World War.

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Was that early evidence of the cultural influences of Hollywood, a primeval moment of the imperialism of one culture, the subjugation of another? It seems almost boorish to think of it that way. Was the little man not a deep well of pleasure through laughter, a pleasure that was simply universal in appeal? Was it not Chaplin's real genius to strike some common chord, uniting the whole of humanity? Is that not, in fact, the real genius of American popular culture, to bind together, better than anything else, common humanity? This is all terribly heretical, and yet I am more and more tempted in this little excursion to propose that the cultural imperialism thesis be stood on its head, and to suggest instead an analysis, not of exploitation, but of service—of the proffering of cultural imagery that is absorbed by more deep-seated cultural strata. That leads me, not to ask about the thesis, but to pose questions about those who proffer it. There has to be an explanation why such an intellectually undernourished theory holds such sway.

I also ask why it is that the ubiquity of the likes of *Dallas* is held in such contempt, whereas the ubiquity of, say, the Beatles or Chaplin himself is, one senses, held in awe. Perhaps we need an alternative way of looking at the general popularity of much television around the globe. George Steiner recently published an interesting book about Sophocles's *Antigone*,[26] in which he asked why this Greek tragedy has continued to haunt European culture over the past two centuries. He looks at the way in which such nineteenth-century thinkers as Hegel and Kierkegaard treated issues raised by the story—for example, the conflict between the demands of the state and private conscience answerable to a higher law. For Steiner, this embodies the wider question of why the central themes of Greek mythology exercise such a powerful hold on the European mind. Why, after two thousand years, do we still speak of narcissism, the labors of Hercules, the Oedipus complex, the Minotaur? Steiner himself flirts briefly with Jung's theory of archetypes—certain themes, situations, and figures basic to the inner realities of human experience which Greek mythology embodied in a uniquely direct way. Is it possible that in order to understand, at least in part, the popularity of the television of the North Atlantic basin one has to understand the ways in which it successfully employs certain themes, situations, and figures, rather than just pricing-mechanisms, pace, glossy sets, exotic locations, or whatever? Is the interesting thing

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about television, in short, perhaps not what it *imposes* but what it *taps?*

We need also to get back to basics, to consider how we assess the position of the individual in a theory of influences of communication. In the past ten to fifteen years, communications research has left behind any ideas of the "hypodermic needle" model of attitudinal and behavioral changes, and moved towards a greater emphasis on audience dispositions and intentions examined within the context of broader collective, system-wide processes. It is increasingly recognized that it is simply inadequate to treat audiences as a uniform mass, and message reception as a unidimensional process.

The demand for forms of analysis that allow, not for the uniformities, but for the divergences of human response has come from anthropologists such as Mary Douglas, with her analysis of taste as a function of the experience of group identity, hierarchy, and institution, as well as from mass-communications researchers and theorists. Douglas suggests that audience research must be able to account for the reasons that certain messages (such as comedians' jokes) "reach right through the class structure."[27] She suggests that vertical taste groups exist which cut through class, that the taste of bureaucrats will be the same at the top as at the bottom of a bureaucratic structure. This is clearly potentially relevant to any analysis of the reasons why products of one particular cultural context cut across what are ostensibly a whole range of contexts having different histories, sociopolitical orders, and so on.

Whatever the individual merits or faults of these notions, it seems clear that the one-dimensional view of the audience which was encapsulated within the mass-society theory, and to a certain extent within the cognitive and instrumental bias of the uses and gratifications approach, needs to be replaced by engagements with audience experience. These take into account the variable contexts within which messages are received, and the complex manner in which individuals ascribe meaning to these messages. The difficulty is that there has been, in the whole field of the mass media, precious little such empirical analysis.

However, even in those areas of communications in developed societies where there has been a good deal of work, there are important differences between the theoretical and empirical conclusions that have been drawn. That most researched area, the effects of

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televised violence, is a veritable minefield of conceptual and methodological uncertainties. In 1983, the United States National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) published its report *Television and Behavior*. In this review of social research conducted over the past decade on the effects of television, the conclusion was drawn that, whatever the uncertainties that might have previously existed about the evidence of the effects of television, the answers were now known. It stated that the "consensus among most of the research community is that violence on television does lead to aggressive behavior by children and teenagers who watch the programs. . . . The research question has moved from asking whether or not there is an effect to seeking explanations for the effect." Dr. David Pearl, the principal author of the report, added that "while there is some evidence which is not completely congruent with our conclusions, nevertheless, reasonable researchers have considered all of that and have concluded really that there is very little question left any longer."[28] The problem with this statement is that there are many reasonable researchers who quite seriously question the conclusions.[29]

The basic premise in George Gerbner's long-standing study of cultural indicators, in which he has mapped the manner in which television portrays American life, is that, as a leisure activity, television cuts across educational and income lines, providing the symbolic environment and world view of the majority of Americans. At the same time, Gerbner argues that, because of its links with state and industry, television has become an agency of social control for the status quo. As did the Church in the Middle Ages, television systematically cultivates in its viewers a world view and values that support the established power structure. In short, television does to the *American* people what it is held to do—by certain authors—to the rest of the world.

The slight problem with all this is that some quite serious questions have been posed as to whether Gerbner really found what he claims to have found. Take, for example, the "evidence" of the relationship between televised violence and the "fearful" sense of reality felt by heavy viewers. Mallory Wober, a researcher at the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) in London, found no evidence of increased fear and distrust among heavy television viewers in Britain.[30] Doob and McDonald, controlling for the crime rate in respondents' neighborhoods, reported no overall relationship between

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television viewing and fear of being a victim of crime.[31] Even more confusing, Paul Hirsch of the University of Chicago took the data Gerbner had used—not different data asking similar questions, but the very same evidence—and argued that heavy viewing did not relate to increased perceptions of violence.[32] Hirsch's basic position is that our understanding of how the audience relates to television, uses it, responds to it, and so forth, is extremely limited. Gerbner himself, when faced with apparent contradictions in his own data (such as that heavy TV viewers in violent neighborhoods perceive less violence than lighter viewers) developed a subtheory called mainstreaming, in which people living *in extremis* are dragged back towards a mass-mediated central position.

This is all terribly confusing and uncertain, but it does point to the fact that, while there may be certain virtues in using statistical survey analyses to understand the role of television in human society, even in the most researched area of television, in the most researched society on earth, the conclusions are still at best tentative and at worst positively misleading. I should add that this applies even to rigorously designed and conducted pieces of work, a description I do not apply to many of the descriptions of television as an internationally dominant force.

In the United States, the most fruitful critique of the kind of analysis which imputes such force and power to television has come from, among others, Horace Newcombe and James Carey.[33] Newcombe argues that there are many conceptions of violence in the American cultural tradition, and that these will find various forms of expression in the different media. Nor is it possible to assume that the viewing public is a passive or barely active receptor for a "television reality." He argues forcefully that the mistake made by the Gerbner kind of analysis is to "measure the incidence of violence in television as they have defined it, impute aesthetic and behavioral effects to the incidence so measured and then interpret the world of television in light of that effect." What obviously follows from this kind of analysis is a call for a much more comprehensive and subtle understanding of the relationship among the individual, media influences, and national cultural development. James Carey, for example, has suggested that the root problem of American communication research has been its dependence on a "cause-effect" "transportation model" that defines communication as the "transmission of messages

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for purposes of control." The only source of meaning is the message-sender—the "cause" part of the equation. The audience is no more than the passive receptor of information and behavior modification—the "effects." This deformed paradigm is hardly surprising, given the origins of American communications research in studies of propaganda, advertising, mass campaigns, and other crude attempts at social engineering to serve the ends of the state.

Carey proposes a more adequate "ritual model" of communication, a process by which a shared culture is created, modified, and transformed. *Meaning* thus flows from the totality of human interaction: not from some abstract sender, but from the historic-cultural tradition and a concrete politico-economic context. Knotted together are sets of shared beliefs, experiences, public debate, myth creation, and rendition (as well as myth destruction) in a constant search for shared meaning. The principal task of communication research, then, is to enter into the different subjective meanings people create in popular movements, religion, journalism, everyday speech, and mass-mediated events in order to interpret these meanings and bring them into a more systematic picture of the world view and ethos of a social order.

The point I am making is that it is not possible, on the basis of evidence from the national scene where its force must be highly qualified, for television somehow to be magically possessed of a powerful force on the international scene. I am thinking specifically here of the notion of ideological and cultural influence over a television audience. Yet in a curious kind of way, the level of analysis employed for understanding the implications of the mass media at the international, as opposed to the national and individual level, has remained frozen at the stage of intellectual development achieved by communications research in the first three or four decades of this century.

The now largely discredited hypodermic model that dominated communications research, particularly in the United States from the 1930s to the 1960s, had as its central premise the idea that the power of the mass media in the industrial societies was based on the way in which industrialization and urbanization had destroyed primary groups such as the family, thereby creating an atomised social structure and the vulnerable individual as a member of an undifferentiated mass. Although this model has since been abandoned for

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domestic analysis, its presence can still be clearly detected in discussions of international communications. There is a certain irony in this, in that if the dominance model is applied to *developing* societies—which take on, as it were, the characteristics of the theoretically vulnerable individual—then the model applies even less. It simply would not make sense, since the non-industrial developing societies do not even have the minimum conditions for the mass-society model, i.e., atomization and alienation resulting from industrialization and urbanization, the breakup of the family and kinship structures, and so on. Television's influence would therefore be even *less* likely to prevail here than in industrialized societies.

However one looks at the evidence, it is perfectly clear that we understand very little about television's role in people's lives. What we do know, is that it is one small influence among many that mold and move and shape human emotion and intellect and therefore affect society. One cannot simply drag people from within their own history, the moments that have shaped them, that aggregate of experience and objective forces that envelope individual's lives, and ascribe some overwhelming force to a single element, television.

In short, the idea of an all-powerful medium, while readily mouthed by those who would offer a simplistic analysis of the human condition and its development, does not rest on any clear or obvious evidence. It is especially difficult to see why it should be held to work at the macro-national level, and yet this is precisely the argument implied by such authors as Herb Schiller, Cees Hamelink, and similar-minded thinkers.

Those who favor the idea of cultural dominance through television have tended to study company reports, rather than the realities of individual lives; to describe the flow of communication in the abstract, rather than the cultural meanings of those flows. This idea is hitched to a model of influences which, for two decades, has been known to be at best inadequate. It espouses a touching belief in the perfectability of man, illustrated by the apparent conviction that human flaws, inadequacies, and problems flow from the sociocultural, Anglo-Saxon–dominated infrastructure of the world economy, in which the indigenous population is no more than an innocent fly caught in a beguiling, sticky, and overpowering spider's web. Supporters of this theory have demonstrated a certain myopia: their gaze has focused on the inadequacies and awfulness of Western society,

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while remaining blind to one or two problems and difficulties the more objective eye might detect east of the Elbe, and indeed within the sociopolitical character of many developing societies. They have failed to develop a model that allows for resistance, for oppositional forces—and not opposition by a captive population to the alleged dominant power and its culture, because such a captive population never existed in the first place. They have offered a patronizing, pat-on-the-head pity for populations they feel are not capable of knowing their own mind. Finally, the dominance model has failed to recognize that a theory that cannot be translated into empirically apprehendable propositions is no theory at all, and tends to dissolve into the fevered imaginings of the subjective observer.

In the context of this last observation, I am struck by a peculiar feature shared by all English-based analyses of communications. There is an extraordinary resistance among intellectuals and pundits of broadcasting even to consider doing something as unseemly as finding out about the audience experience. Instead, the debate takes place in cloistered isolation, over dinner tables, in L'Escargot, at the Edinburgh Television Festival, or at the Royal Television Society convention. Never is anything as unseemly as an understanding of the actual cultural *experience* of television allowed to intrude on the cosy camaraderie and wit of the television industry; no more than a bat's squeak of an effort is made to study television as a social experience. I suspect that the reasons for this lie in their unease, even distaste, with the fact that the techniques of audience research necessarily imply a positivistic apprehension of the senses.

I was much struck by a paper given by Professor John Dancy, at the British Association for the Advancement of Science meeting in Cambridge in September 1965, on the philosophy of technical education. In it, he spoke of a "siren song that has beguiled Europe" ever since the Renaissance—the voice of Plato. Plato's whole approach to philosophy exalted the mind at the expense of the body, ideas over matter, and theory over experiment. This outlook, Dancy argued, helped produce "a snobbish attitude to applied science which runs like an ugly thread through the history of European thought." Plato made a distinction between the superior realm of *pure* knowledge, *pure* ideas, and the subordinate realm of the *mere* practical arts, *mere* opinion, *mere* world of the senses: "Plato's caste society runs from the philosopher-kings at the top to the mere artisans at the

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bottom. For Plato was social and intellectual snob rolled into one, a combination irresistable to the English. His intellectual theory matched and reinforced our traditional and social practice."[34] There is a creeping fear within much of the debate about television of declining intellectual artisanship. The net effect has been a shallow understanding of communication as a social process. What is equally lacking in American theories of cultural dominance is, paradoxically, a real grasp of the idea of culture. The problem was well summed up by James Carey: "The concept of culture is such a weak and evanescent notion in American social thought."[35]

There remains, however, an almost inevitable potency in the idea that cultures, consciousness, the life of the mind—call it what you will—are heavily influenced by the forms of communication that prevail. This idea appeals, not just in its ideological soundness, but in the beauty of its simplicity. This has been especially true for theories of mass communications, in which the whole nation is alleged to be held within the grip, the thrall, of a single force, broadcasting. I have never myself held to the view of an awesomely powerful media. In fact, it is interesting to try to search for instances where one could truly place the influence of communications within the cultural equivalent of the laboratory experiment, in which it is possible to weigh certain influences against others.

Two instances in history can be pinpointed, both arising from the total destruction of Germany and Japan in 1945 and their subsequent capitulation to military government and occupation. The Allied powers set out, not just to rebuild the physical fabric of two shattered societies or to pacify nations with which they had been locked in bitter conflict or to restore a sense of order or reestablish the institutions necessary to any society. They wished all those things and more. Quite simply, they set out to recreate the cultural, social, and moral—as well as the physical—fabric of the vanquished nations. They were, in essence, creating something in their own image and likeness: they were playing God. They did this partly out of a barely known sense of duty; partly because when one had tramped across Europe or the Pacific one had to do something; partly as a guarantee against future aggression; and partly as a means of establishing bulwarks against other future aggressors.

In doing so, they provided conditions in which the social structure was transparent, where one could see the latticework of social and

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institutional relationships, could see which elements were the real supports and which the adornments. In short, they provided the "laboratory" where one could examine the relationship between societies and their communications systems. What is perfectly clear, on the basis of those experiences, is the extent to which the roots of cultural formation lie in something far richer and more profound than the influence of mass-mediated audio-visual culture.

Let me give a tiny example. One of the efforts of the United States in Japan, as part of its effort to restructure the prevailing ideologies and practices of Japanese society, was to reform the theater. The *kami shibai,* for example, the paper theater, was full of samurai virtues, fighting, and death—those values that many Americans (and certainly the theorists in the State Department) believed played a key role in the rise of the nationalism and militarism that led to Pearl Harbor. It was held as axiomatic that the kami shibai's values would have to be eradicated. To that end, directives were issued, purges carried out, orders enforced, to change this part of Japanese theater. This was but a microcosm of the way Americans sought to change Japanese culture during those years of occupation and control. Now, *that* is what I would call cultural dominance, and yet this example also reveals the very limited capacity to effect influence even where one has total power, since whatever else happened, those "samurai" values were not expunged from Japanese society.

Consider also the example of Poland. I have asked many times, and received no meaningful answer to the question: if, as the dominance model asserts, the possession of economic and institutional power is the same as ownership of cultural power, where does the case of Poland fit? In Poland, despite the fact that the state has massive control of every organization of cultural and informational influence—TV, radio, press, publishing, education—it has hardly a jot of influence on the prevailing system of values and preferences, the shared symbols that combine to make up the modern Polish mind. Or consider the instability of large parts of the globe over which U.S. hegemony is alleged to hold sway, and where American interests are protected and enhanced by support for military dictatorship or by active economic destabilization and overt military intervention. Langley and Foggy Bottom are, I am afraid, vastly more important than Southfork in the determination of global events and thinking.

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Certainly there are influences, though they tend to be somewhat different from those offered by the thesis of cultural dominance. Not only does that thesis have an inadequate grasp of the sociological experience of television populations, but it also reflects a deep-seated and misplaced pessimism about how audiences will make choices. The problem, however, lies not with the audience as such, but with the way in which decision-makers in the television industry close off options available to the audience. They do this by withdrawing resources from domestic production, or by putting resources into grandiose schemes that, while chic, may be largely irrelevant, or positively harmful, to the development of a society. The former is certainly a problem of developed societies such as Britain. The latter is a problem particular to developing societies, and one I would like to focus on here.

Take, for instance, the case of Sri Lanka. Throughout the history of broadcasting in Sri Lanka, when radio was the dominant medium, there was a long and interesting, though often acrimonious, debate about the public and socially purposive function of broadcasting and its relationship to the state. With television, however, Sri Lanka necessarily opened up the possibility of a whole new set of structural influences that could not possibly have existed in the same way, or to the same extent, during its radio age. And with television comes another set of influences—the whole panoply of the satellite age.

The evidence for this can be seen in the recent establishment in Sri Lanka of the extraordinarily named Arthur C. Clarke Centre for Third World Communications, Energy, and Space Technology at the University of Moratuwa. Esmond Wickramsinghe, addressing the non-aligned Information Ministers Conference in Indonesia, commented: "We are seeking to use the center to train personnel from Sri Lanka and other Third World countries, but it is important for all of us to develop our own institutions. Only then can we learn how to handle satellite, computer and information technology." One can't help feeling that, by playing a game whose rules are largely set by multinationals and the major industrial societies, a weeping and gnashing of teeth lies in store for Sri Lanka. Equally, one can't help feeling that Third World countries are being asked to step into the post-industrial age when they have hardly stepped into the industrial age.

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That developing countries feel an imperative to leap-frog into the post-industrial age was evidenced in March 1982 in Jamaica. Edward Seaga, the prime minister, announced plans to establish a $14 million film and television center in Montego Bay, finance for which was to come from private Jamaican and American investors. The official press release in March 1982 announced: "The development of the facility represents an important milestone in Mr. Seaga's efforts to encourage private investment in Jamaica to boost its economic recovery and to establish the island as a modern media center, able to attract cultural programs on a worldwide basis." Seaga himself added: "The future of the world is in the growth of the information industries, and while we are trying to catch up with lost opportunities of basic industrialization missed over the last few years, we must also move decisively to carve out our place in the future, so that Jamaica will never again find itself struggling in the backwoods."

Plans for the Clarke Centre include the "initiation of research and development in the applications of communications and computer technologies to the problems of developing countries." In his address to Parliament in February 1983, President Jayewardene said: "We must look forward to the future. The foundations for spiritual and material progress according to contemporary world conditions have been laid. . . . We hope to lead our youth into the technological age, complete with the robots and computers."

The point here, once more, is quite a simple one: the influence of the developments in international communications systems lies not in their capacity to shape minds and cultures, but in their influence on the development of communications policies by nation states, in the allocation of scarce resources, and in the creation of inflated and unrealistic national expectations. What I am also suggesting is that, in looking at the question of international television, one is slowly led from the simplicities and ideology of the debates about the general patterns of the distribution of television to ways in which that pattern will be influenced by evolving technologies; from there, one is led to consider how attitudes towards those technologies fit into larger debates about the construction of totally new communications policies in which television is no more than a sideshow.

What I have been suggesting throughout this paper is that we have barely begun to scratch the surface of understanding the function and consequence of TV as an international cultural process. I have also

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been suggesting that it is not good enough merely to reiterate the details of ownership and control on a global scale and thereby impute a cultural meaning to them. Of course, there is a difficulty of conceptualization and methodology. The more analysts pursue the ostensibly objective truth of abstract statements based on survey returns, the more they lose touch with what one might call the human truth. Often, the sociological imagination seems loftily removed from the real world, bled dry of any human content. It seems to want to avoid, in this field at least, what E.P. Thompson has called "the collisions of evidence and the awkward confrontations of experience." Equally often, the literary imagination and the eye of the anthropologist seem to have so much more of an engagement with the flesh-and-blood of a social order. It is that gulf between what needs to be said and done and what to date has not been done that must be confronted. It is just this gulf, however, that the vast bulk of the debate about TV as a culturally dominant force has miserably failed to confront. Fortunately, there are some signs that this is now being recognized.

Take the example of imported television in Jamaica. On the one hand, we have the view espoused by Everold Hosein,[36] who dismisses the influence of foreign-produced programs as having been exaggerated and being of little consequence in a country's pursuit of national goals for development. On the other hand, we have the implications of Herb Schiller's more pessimistic scenarios that television is the means by which lifestyle and value systems can be imposed on poor and vulnerable societies. Nancy George, a Jamaican academic, has also pursued these questions within her own country. She makes a number of statements that seem to ally her with Schiller. She speaks of the dangerous trends that she sees flowing from the presence of American TV in Jamaica: "a virtual contradiction of espoused governmental policies and a proliferation of stereotypical imagery which sets up unrealistic pictures of life and opportunities in the United States. Simultaneously these programs establish a class hierarchy built on color, wealth, sex and physical strength." She continues with such observations: "The series gain an air of authority and reality which may never have been intended originally—dissemination of American consumerism or English luxury could have a deleterious impact on the Jamaican economy, given the current economic difficulties being experienced." Intriguingly, she adds at the

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end of her piece: "The greatest difficulty in assessing the impact of foreign programming in Jamaica is that the assessment of their impact, and impact of nationally produced programming, is based on limited observations, speculations and deduction rather than on any solid data."[37]

And "Amen" to that, because what she is saying is that the assertions are not statements of what is known, but of what is imagined: they are hypotheses about little-understood processes and as such are similar to the vast bulk of the statements about the alleged dominance of international TV. They might be correct, but then again they might not.

The implication here is that new strategies need to be developed for understanding the patterns and meanings that emerge when an audience in one culture watches television programs from another. The problem one faces is how to capture a cultural experience, employing widely recognized methods and conceptual frameworks, without reproducing evidence that is so abstract as to be devoid of any real engagement with given experience. In short, to have the sharpness of the acute critical eye, while holding to the recognized verities of social science.

In all research on television, there is a crying need to employ both quantitative *and* qualitative methods. It would be relatively simple to construct a questionnaire addressing issues of television use and consumption. The problem is that there is no obvious connection between the type of information such a questionnaire would provide, and the more general and problematic questions that are now frequently posed concerning the socioeconomic and cultural impact of communications on societies and cultures.

There are methodological options that would tie up the simple demographic information with the more complex problems concerning the social and cultural implications of the flow of television. In these terms, any study of the consumption of television becomes the nodal point for a broader discussion of the relationship between leisure and culture, work and family, ethnicity and national sovereignty.

In terms of techniques, what would be sought would be a triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods. On the quantitative side is the traditional sample-survey of audience uses with which we are all familiar. By this method it is possible to examine

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differences in demographic characteristics, patterns of leisure, family interaction, and so on, between those who are, for example, heavy and light television viewers. In-depth, small-group questionnaires could be used to focus on the more complex problems of the relationship between viewing certain types of product and the functioning of national and cultural identities.

There are various options here. One technique many researchers in media studies have found helpful is that of the Q-Sort. In this method, the researcher uses evaluative statements about a particular medium which have been generated by a pre-test group, and which normally have a seven-point scale, from agree to disagree. The researcher administers these statements to a series of small groups, which are pre-structured in terms of age, sex, class, and geographical area, or in whatever ways the researcher thinks important.

These groups then sort the questions into those they agree with, those they disagree with, and those on which they have no opinion. The researcher factor-analyzes these responses. From the intercorrelations of variables, certain *underlying* variables can be discovered that can be used to generate information on attitudes and uses of the medium. An obvious example of the distinctions that might be elicited would be between those who value television primarily for information, and those who use television primarily as a form of escapism.

Another possibility for building on this technique would be to tie diaries, or a panel study, to the families of the discussion groups. Still another option would be one developed by the Katz *Dallas* study, in which small groups in Israel and the U.S. filled in quite simple questionnaires about the amount of time they spent watching *Dallas*, who they watched with, and so on. The researchers then watched an episode of *Dallas* with them, and conducted an interview afterwards. The interviews were open-ended, but the interviewers had a check list of issues they had to raise.

It would be possible to extend this to other areas of imported television. Groups of, say, ten people would discuss their viewing, considering the individual gratifications, as well as the broader issues such as linguistic and national identity.

One might also develop more ethnographically based, participant, quasi-anthropological studies to understand the meaning of television within a given culture. If nothing else, this would have the benefit

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of re-engaging communications research with some of the classic texts of sociology. Such methods could and should be balanced with the other methods of interview, group discussion, and survey.

It goes without saying that such research would need to be undertaken by native-speaking and -thinking researchers, and not by an imported researcher just off the last plane. It also goes without saying that such a strategy would require something of a drastic rethink on the part of major funding agencies such as UNESCO, which, for whatever reasons of finance and ideology, tend to be locked into providing the resources for grand if rather superficial pieces of research.

The strategy asks communications researchers to produce more qualitative analysis and to spend less time on the preparation of grand theory (often grand only to themselves) and the exercise of social science as ideology. Instead, researchers should lower their sights and actually go out and meet the objects of their passion and concern.

There is an excellent book about the First World War called *The Great War and Modern Memory,* by Paul Fussell. Here, Fussell considers the ways in which the 1914–18 war influenced the internal structure of Western thought and thus provided an emotional and intellectual watershed in modern history, a shift in the sensibility of modern man. Fussell takes apart language and shows how meaning was transformed in those years. It is only there, in the fine grain of the human mood explored through any and every available method—but crucially through an intimate understanding of audiences as people and not as abstract undifferentiated aggregates to whom we, in our rather superior way, believe things to happen—that one will truly come to understand the importance of television and its heirs.

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Michael Ignatieff

Is Nothing Sacred? The Ethics of Television

THE BRITISH NURSE WAS picking her way through the mass of women and children squatting in the dust at the entrance to the field hospital of the refugee camp at Korem in Ethiopia. She was selecting which children could still be helped. She was choosing who would live and who would die. A television crew trailed behind her, moving its way among the starving. A television reporter approached with a mike and asked her how she felt about what she was doing. It was not a question she felt capable of answering. The look she gave the camera came from very far away.

It is in scenes like this one, with questions like this, that television confronts consciences of the West with suffering in the Third World. Through its news broadcasts and spectaculars like "Live Aid," television has become the privileged medium through which moral relations between strangers are mediated in the modern world. Yet the effects of televisual images and the rules and conventions of electronic news-gathering on such moral relations are rarely examined. At first sight, the moral relations instituted by the Ethiopian images could be interpreted in radically different ways, either as an instance of the promiscuous voyeurism a visual culture makes possible, or as a hopeful example of the internationalization of conscience. The difficulty, of course, is that both of these opposing interpretations may be true. Let us take each in turn.

There is little doubt, first of all, that the television coverage of Ethiopia had a remarkable impact upon Western charity. In Britain

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alone, more than £60 million was donated to famine relief agencies in the months since the Ethiopian footage was first shown in October 1984. For the first time since Biafra, governments throughout Europe found themselves under continuous public pressure on a development issue. Many facts known but relegated to the realm of the taken-for-granted—the tons of surplus grain produced by the European Common Market agricultural policy—suddenly became a public scandal when juxtaposed with the images coming out of Ethiopia.[1] TV brought public pressure to bear upon the bureaucratic inertia, logistical stumbling blocks, and ideological excuses that had allowed a long-predicted food crisis to become a disaster. Television helped to institute a direct relation of people to people which cut through bilateral governmental mediations. For a brief moment, it created a new kind of electronic internationalism linking the consciences of the rich and the needs of the poor. As a medium, television dramatically reduced the lag-time between pressure and action, between need and response. Without it, thousands more Ethiopians would have died, as they have died unseen and unlamented by the West in the famines that have ravaged the country nearly every twenty years in this century.

Yet if this is the case for television's good conscience over the Ethiopian story, there are other more troubling aspects to the gaze it cast on disaster. There is the accusation that TV news ignored food shortages until they acquired the epic visual appeal of famine, and there is the suspicion that the story will drop out of the nightly bulletins when the focus upon horror shifts elsewhere in the world.[2] The medium's gaze is brief, intense, and promiscuous. The shelf life of the moral causes it makes its own is brutally short. Other disquieting aspects of the televisual gaze are brought into focus by the reporter's question to the nurse: how do you feel? The question may have come out of a desire to reach out across the distance the reporter knew to separate her from those watching in their living room. It may also have come out of a need to fill the terrible silence, the unspeaking finality, of those starving at his feet. But the question served only to make plain the chasm that empathy—"suffering with"—cannot hope to cross. The question laid bare the interstellar moral distances that a culture of visual images conjures away with its cruel mime of immediacy.

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On the one hand, television has contributed to the breakdown of the barriers of citizenship, religion, race, and geography that once divided our moral space into those we were responsible for and those who were beyond our ken. On the other hand, it makes us voyeurs of the suffering of others, tourists amidst their landscapes of anguish. It brings us face to face with their fate, while obscuring the distances—social, economic, moral—that lie between us. It is this tangle of contradictory, mutually cancelling, effects that I want to try to unravel.

II

Television images, as Jonathan Miller says elsewhere in this volume, cannot assert anything; they can only instantiate something. The images from Ethiopia do not assert their own meaning; they can only instantiate a moral claim if those who watch understand themselves to be potentially under obligation to those they see. Behind the seemingly natural mechanics of empathy at work in viewers' response to these images lies a history by which their consciences were formed to respond as they do. It is the history by which Europeans gradually came to believe in a myth of human universality—the simple idea that race, religion, sex, citizenship, or legal status do not justify unequal treatment; or, more positively, that human needs and pain are universally the same, and that we may be obliged to help those to whom we are unrelated by birth or citizenship, race or geographic proximity.

The Christian promise of the universality of salvation was the first ethical claim to confront the classical partition of humanity into citizens and slaves, and the medieval common law built this idea of the identity of all human subjects into the basis of European legal systems. With the Reformation, the human universality premised on the unity of Christendom had to be thought anew for a world divided into warring confessions.[3] The jurisprudence developed by Grotius and Pufendorf sought to provide a universal natural law for a world of sharply conflicting laws and ethics. Natural law was centrally concerned with defining the rights of those strangers—prisoners of war, survivors of wrecks—who happened to fall from one jurisdiction into another, or who fell between them, and who thus stood in defenseless dependence on a culture of obligation between themselves

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and their captors or rescuers. Much of this struggle to define and defend the rights of a universal subject went on against a somber and even despairing backdrop of religious war.[4]

From the pens of Montaigne, Bayle, Locke, and many others who were disgusted by the ways in which partial human identities—religion, nation, region—were used to justify the slaughter of other human beings, there emerged the modern doctrine of toleration. Its central claim, as Judith Shklar and others have pointed out, was to deny that sins against God—blasphemy, heresy, disobedience—justified sins against men. No higher law could justify the non-judicial taking of human life.[5] The exponents of the doctrine of toleration also insisted that, given the shared human ignorance about the ultimate metaphysical foundations of the world, all human creatures had an equal right to construe those foundations as best they could, provided they did no harm to the property and lives of others. The philosophical ground for civil peace among confessional communities within and between states, the seventeenth-century philosophers argued, was a shared adherence to the idea of natural human identity and equality.

All of this applied, of course, only to white males within the European world, but its application to the non-white peoples encountered on the frontier of the European penetration of North and South America was only too apparent to figures like Montaigne and Las Casas. If their pens were unable to halt or delay the decimation that accompanied European imperialism, they helped to create that sense of guilt, that sense of conscience betrayed, that is as much at the heart of the imperialist story as conquest itself. If European imperialism was premised on a partible conception of human identity—us and them, white and black, Christian and heathen, civilized and savage—there was always present in the European conscience a Christian and jurisprudential universalism to mock this partible, racialist, definition of human obligations. We are still living out the history of conscience that began with the first European voyages of discovery, but surely one of the moments when the universalist definition of human identity won an irreversible victory over the partible definition was the successful campaign against the slave trade, and then against slavery itself, from 1750 to 1850.[6] Certainly, the intentions at work in these campaigns were not exclusively high-minded: the costs of slavery, the relative inefficiency of slaves compared to free labor, also

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counted in the squaring of the pocketbook and the conscience. Indeed, this whole story cannot be written as a progressive unfolding of moral enlightenment, but rather as a struggle to reconcile universalist moral impulses with their often uncomfortable consequences.

Some of these consequences were brought into sharp focus by the issue of famine. From the time of the early Church fathers, the question of whether the duty to relieve the needs of the poor was a compulsory obligation or a voluntary one was central in the debate about the public ethics of a Christian person. If the obligation was one of justice, the needs of the poor might be said to give them a right to the property of the rich. Church fathers like Aquinas were concerned that this right would unsettle the fixed entitlement to property which was the basis of social order itself. On the other hand, an obligation to help the poor which was merely one of charity might result in the starvation of many in times of famine. The history of Christian ethics revolved around this debate between the rights of property and the claims of the property—less in time of famine.[7] In practice, the claims of ethical universalism came to be strongly limited in Christian teaching and then in European natural law by the injunction that a rich man had a merely voluntary charitable obligation to strangers in need. In more general terms, a descending order of moral impingement has come into place: the claims of kith and kin first, then neighbors, co-religionists, co-citizens, and only at the very end, the indeterminate stranger. To this day, the claim of the stranger—the Ethiopian on the screen—is the furthest planet in the solar system of our moral obligations. The claim that we should help those "closer to home" will always be persuasive. Whether or not it is right to be so persuaded is another matter. There is thus a great deal of moral confusion in the supposed natural outflow of charitable empathy over Ethiopia: faced with two claims—one based on the extent of need, the other on the closeness to us of the subject in need—we tend to choose in favor of the latter. There has always been a conflict, therefore, between the conscience of ethical universalism and the demands of a private property system, and between the known subject of need and the stranger at the gate. The history of ethics is a history of contradiction, not a history of progress.

Faced with this history of contradiction, the Marxist tradition has always regarded bourgeois moral universalism as a veil of ideological deception concealing—from the bourgeois conscience itself and from

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the awareness of those it exploits—the exploitation and inequality integral to the reproduction of capitalist social relations. Marxists have also argued that the doctrine of the natural inviolability of all individuals as rights-bearing creatures could only become a reality in societies that do away with capitalist and imperialist social relations.[8] The history of Marxist sarcasm towards bourgeois universalism would give special mention to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Humanism and Terror* written as a reply to liberal and socialist critiques of the show trials of Stalin. The humanist critique of Soviet political violence, Merleau-Ponty argued, was a hypocritical attempt to deny the violence constitutive of bourgeois rule itself, as well as an attempt to delegitimize a revolution's necessary means of self-defense. The pity of bourgeois humanism, Merleau-Ponty argued, was a form of piety that refused to understand that violence has been the motor of progress from the rise of the bourgeoisie to the triumph of the Soviet revolution.[9]

Roland Barthes's essay on the photographic exhibit "The Family of Man" belongs to this postwar French Marxist counterattack on bourgeois humanism, and extended Merleau-Ponty's line of argument into the realm of aesthetics. The exhibition's celebration of man's natural human identity—his membership in "the family of man"—Barthes argued, reduced real historical men and women to the inconsequential sameness of their zoological identity. In doing so, the images sought to wrap essential elements of human experience—work, play, suffering, and grief—in an aura of eternal inevitability, and thus to remove suffering and oppression from the ambit of human agency.[10]

If we follow this Marxist critique of bourgeois cant, the shame of the Ethiopian images would lie not in what they show, but in what they suppress. The culture of the visual image, so a Marxist would argue, moralizes the relation between viewer and sufferer as an eternal moment of empathy outside history. Television mediates economic and political relations as human relations, and asserts a connection between the Western conscience and the needs of the strangers of the Third World as inhering in human nature itself, beneath the history of exploitation that links the West to its neo-colonial hinterland. On this view, the charity unleashed by empathy is a form of forgetting, the reproduction of amnesia towards the responsibility of the West for the causes of African famine.

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It is doubtless true that the mechanisms of pity are a complex mixture of forgetting and condescension, and heightened self-regard is a constitutive part of the glow of moral empathy with the suffering of others. Yet television's—and our own—encounter with these images is considerably more ambivalent than such an analysis would suggest. While it is easy to argue that a culture of the visual image favors the icons of suffering over the tomes of analysis, it simply isn't the case that pictures of the famine have suppressed analysis of its causes. Every structural feature of the crisis—the arms race in the Horn of Africa, the injustices of the world commodity price system, the failure of Western development agencies to invest sufficiently in soil reclamation, land reform, and resettlement projects, the grotesque preference of local rulers to fight their civil wars instead of attending to the needs of their peoples—all these have been documented on television.[11] If viewers take it for granted that the Ethiopian starving are, in some degree, their business, it is because the pictures have been preceded by more than a decade of documentaries on Third World development, which, while tending to favor the ideology of Robert MacNamara at the expense of Franz Fanon, have at least made plain some of the structures of neo-colonial economic and political dependency. Current-affairs television did not create this new culture of understanding between First and Third Worlds which mediates the flow of empathy between viewer and sufferer, but it has played an honest and sometimes honorable part in building an inchoate popular understanding of development issues in Western public opinion. If television is bourgeois ideology, then the least we have to say is that bourgeois ideology—in relation to the Third World—is a deeply complex mixture of willed amnesia, guilty conscience, moralizing self-regard, and real understanding. Television does not suppress this ambivalence; it faithfully reproduces it in all its confusion.

The myth of human identity, that vision of common human needs and common human pain that binds viewer and sufferer together, is itself fraught with ambiguity. White viewers who mail checks on behalf of black victims at the other side of the globe may combine their generosity with very different behavior towards blacks nearer home. One of empathy's pleasures is to forget one's moral inconsistencies. Yet the claim that moral empathy at this distance is nothing more than self-deceiving myth relies tacitly on a moral myth of its

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own: that full moral empathy—full "suffering with," based on commonality of experience—is possible only among persons who share the same social identity, for example, the same class. Class identity, however, is no less mythic, no less imagined, than universal human brotherhood. The ethics that derive from it must divide the world into us and them, friends and enemies. The moral internationalism based on class solidarity has had its hours of glory—the International Brigade in Spain, for example—but also its hours of ignominy. When the Soviet tanks rolled into Hungary and Czechoslovakia, the troops were told they were marching to the aid of their comrades against the common class enemy. "Weeding out the class enemy" has been the moral *mot d'ordre* for the atrocities committed in the van of the Soviet and partisan armies after World War II, not to mention in the rice paddies of Kampuchea. If the fragile internationalism of the myth of human brotherhood has returned as a moral force in the modern world it is because partial human solidarities—those of religion, ethnicity, and class—have dishonored themselves by the slaughter committed in their name. Human brotherhood may be a myth, and a weak one at that, but it is the only myth that has yet to murder someone in its cause.

In the twentieth century, however, this myth has a more somber moral hue than such nineteenth-century antecedents as the evangelical campaigns against the slave trade and Gladstone's campaign against the Bulgarian atrocities. Nineteenth-century "bourgeois humanism" drew its inspiration from the political economy of free trade—with its vision of a world of peoples brought together in a world market; from a doctrine of progress which understood the spread of the British imperium as an instance of the march of the human mind, and which conceived of human universality in terms of bringing the lesser breeds within the law of civilization.

In the twentieth century, the idea of human universality rests less on hope than on fear, less on optimism about the human capacity for good than on dread of human capacity for evil, less on a vision of man as maker of his history than of man the wolf towards his own kind. The way stations on the road to this new internationalism were Armenia, Verdun, the Russian front, Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Lebanon. A century of total war has made victims of us all, civilians and military, men, women, and children alike. We no longer live in a time in which violence is distributed—

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and pity and compassion too—along the lines of tribe, race, religion, or nation. If new technology has created a new form of war and a new crime—genocide—we have also witnessed the creation of a new kind of victimhood. War and genocide have overturned the moral boundary-markers of citizenship, race, and class which used to allocate responsibility for the relief of the suffering. If we take it for granted now that the Ethiopians are our responsibility, it is because a century of total destruction has made us ashamed of that cantonment of moral responsibilities by nation, religion, or region which resulted in the abandonment of the Jews. Modern moral universalism is built upon the experience of a new kind of crime: the crime against humanity.[12]

Famine, like genocide, is a process of human fission which pulverizes huge numbers of different individuals into exactly equal units of pure humanity. In the camps that dotted northeastern Europe forty years ago, peasants from Poland, bankers from Hamburg, gypsies from Romania, shopkeepers from Riga—each with a separate social identity and a different kind of relation to their oppressor—were placed on the anvil of suffering and hammered into sameness and then into oblivion. In the Ethiopian camps, highland Christians, lowland Moslems, Eritreans, Tigreans, Afars, and Somalis are being re-worked on the anvil of suffering into the sameness of victimhood.[13] In this process of suffering, each individual was severed from the social relations that, in normal times, would have saved their lives. Each individual in the Ethiopian camps is a son, a daughter, a father, a mother, a tribesmen, a citizen, a believer, a neighbor. Each one of these social relations will sustain an appeal for help in a time of distress. Famine, like genocide, destroys the capillary system of social relations that sustain each individual's system of entitlements. In so doing, genocide and famine create a new human subject—the pure victim stripped of social identity, and thus bereft of the specific moral audience that would in normal times be there to hear his cry. In these conditions, the family, the tribe, the faith, the nation no longer exist as a moral audience for these people. If they are to be saved at all, they must put their faith in that most fearful of dependency relations: the charity of strangers.

Human brotherhood in these conditions, therefore, can be understood as a residual moral system of obligations among strangers which comes into force when all other social relations capable of

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saving a person have been destroyed. In this sense, human brotherhood is a myth made actual and concrete by the history of twentieth-century horror: it is a myth with a history, a necessity only history can give. It is a moral truism, put to the test in the twentieth century on a scale never before imagined, that there is no such thing as love of the human race, only love of this person for that, in this time and place. Obligations, it is always said, are social, contextual, relational, and historical. But what then is to be done for those whose social and historical relations have been utterly pulverized? Human life is now confronted with a range of new conditions—continent-wide famines, nuclear war, ecological catastrophe, and genocide—that constitute victims who have no social relations capable of mobilizing their salvation, and who, as a result, make an ethic of universal moral obligation among strangers a necessity for the future of life on the planet. Doubtless such an ethic of obligation will always have a subsidiary claim on our moral will to the attentions we lavish on a brother, a sister, a fellow citizen, a co-believer, or a co-worker. But without this weak and inconstant ethic, this impersonal commitment to strangers, the universal victim will find no one beyond the wire to feed him. It is this weak moral language, and the new experience of universal victimhood it is trying to address, of which television has become the privileged modern medium.

III

Television is also the instrument of a new kind of politics. Since 1945, affluence and idealism have made possible the emergence of a host of non-governmental private charities and pressure groups—Amnesty International, Care, Save the Children, Christian Aid, Oxfam, Médecins sans Frontières, and others—that use television as a central part of their campaigns to mobilize conscience and money on behalf of endangered humans and their habitat around the world. It is a politics that takes the world rather than the nation as its political space and that takes the human species itself rather than specific citizenship, racial, religious, or ethnic groups as its object. It is a "species politics" striving to save the human species from itself, as Greenpeace and World Wildlife are striving to protect natural and animal species from the predator man. These organizations seek to circumvent the bilateral governmental relations between peoples and

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institute direct political contacts between, for example, Amnesty sponsors and particular political prisoners, or American families and Latin American foster children, field service volunteers and their peasant clients. It is a politics that has tried to constitute a world public opinion to keep watch over the rights of those who lack the means to protect themselves. Using the medium of television, many of these international organizations have managed to force governments to pay some degree of attention to the public-relations costs of their exercises in domestic repression. These organizations also try to raise these costs wherever they can, by persuading Western nations to tie loan agreements, arms contracts, and development packages to certain standards of behavior in the field of human rights. As a result, what happens in the jails of Kampala, Moscow, Memphis, and Johannesburg has become the business of television viewers across the world. At a time when the politics of nation states, when party ideology and civic activism alike, show signs of exhaustion, disillusion and impasse, this new politics has shown itself a robust mobilizer of commitment and money. Its popularity owes much to the fact that it is an anti-politics rejecting all the arguments that political ideologists devise to justify harm done to human beings. It is also an anti-politics in its refusal to differentiate among victims. Amnesty International, for example, refuses to differentiate between right-wing or left-wing political prisoners, between torture conducted in the name of socialist revolution or torture conducted in the name of American-style freedom.[14]

Television is particularly well-suited to certain features of this kind of politics, able as it is to bring political intentions and their consequences face to face with each other: with one flick of an editing switch, television can point out the gulf of abstraction that separates the politican's speech about the defense of freedom from the butchered bodies in the jungle. At its best, television's morality is the morality of the war correspondent, the veteran who has heard all the recurring justifications for human cruelty advanced by the Left and the Right, and who learns in the end to pay attention only to the victims. Don McCullin, the British war photographer, voiced this ethic in his introduction to a collection of some of his photographs of Biafra, Bangladesh, and Vietnam:

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But what are my politics? I certainly take the side of the underprivileged. I could never say I was politically neutral. But whether I'm of the Right or the Left—I can't say. I feel I'm trapped by my background, my inability to retain facts, and my utter bewilderment when faced by political theory: I'm so defeated by it I don't even vote. I've tried to be a witness, an independent spectator, with the result that I can't get beyond the facts of what I've seen. I've experienced too much suffering. I feel, in my guts, at one with the victims. And I find there's integrity in that stance.[15]

Television's good conscience could be described in much the same terms: to pay attention to the victims, rather than the pieties of political rhetoric; to refuse to make a distinction between good corpses and bad ones (though this was notoriously not the case in American coverage of Vietnam); and to be a witness, a bearer of bad tidings to the watching conscience of the world. This is the moral internationalism of the 1980s, and it is a weary world away from the internationalism of the 1960s. If someone had said in 1967 that they refused to distinguish between the human rights violations of the Americans and the North Vietnamese, they would have been set upon by Right and Left in equal measure. But now that a North Vietnamese victory has been followed with further wars of aggrandizement, a moral position that assesses ideologies by the victims they leave behind has gained the right to be heard above the righteous din.

There are fashions in morals as there are fashions in clothes. Television followed moral fashions on the Vietnam war: it did not create them: only television executives believe that television made it impossible for the Americans to win the war. If the dominant ethics in television today is that there are no good causes left—only victims of bad causes—there is no guarantee that the medium will not succumb to the next moral fashion. There is even a danger that television's healthy cynicism towards causes will topple into a shallow kind of misanthropy. The coverage of Lebanon is a case in point. The ethics of victimhood generate empathy only where victims are obviously blameless. In Lebanon, there are victims in abundance, but it is always difficult to identify the innocent in a frenzied killing-ground in which women, children, and the aged—the usual categories of innocence—have been implicated in acts of terrorism and war. Night after night, audiences around the world have watched Christians, Moslems, Jews, Palestinians, Falangists, Shiites, Marxists, anti-Marxists engaged in a seemingly endless cycle of massacre,

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reprisal, and terror. The corpses strewn among the rubble seem to make further comprehension superfluous: here are people locked in a spiral, each with fine reasons for killing each other, each reason as insane as the other. The nightly corpses encouraged a misanthropic retreat from the attempt to understand. One sign of this withdrawal of empathy and understanding was the undersubscription of international appeals on behalf of the Lebanese victims.

Where empathy fails to find the blameless victim—as in Lebanon—the conscience finds comfort in shallow misanthropy. For the reaction—"they're all crazy"—reproduces that reassuring imperial dichotomy between the virtue, moderation, and reasonableness held to exist in the West and the fanaticism and unreason of the East. Here misanthropy shades into amnesia towards all those occasions—Vietnam, the Falklands, the Grenada invasion—where the same consciences that deride the fanatics of the East found themselves swept up in warlike enthusiasms of their own.

It is not only the victims whose world one has to enter, if one wishes to understand Lebanon, but the world of the gunmen, torturers, and apologists of terror. To such people, the idea that human beings are sacred rights-bearing creatures would be true only for their own. As concerns their enemies and their victims, they have carpentered together persuasive reasons for refusing to think of them as human beings at all. The horror of the world lies not just with the corpses, not just with the consequences, but with the intentions, with the minds of killers. Faced with the deep persuasiveness of these ideologies of killing, the temptation to take refuge in moral disgust is strong indeed. Yet disgust is a poor substitute for thought. Television has unfortunate strengths as a medium of moral disgust. As a moral mediator between violent men and the audiences whose attention they crave, television images are more effective at instantiating consequences, than in exploring intentions; more adept at pointing to the corpses than in explaining why violence pays so well in a place like Lebanon. As a result, television news bears some responsibility for that generalized misanthropy, that irritable resignation towards the criminal folly of fanatics and assassins which legitimizes one of the dangerous cultural moods of our time—the feeling that the world has become too crazy to deserve serious reflection.

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IV

Thus far I have made the following arguments: the moral empathy mediated by television has a history—the emergence of moral universalism in the Western conscience; this universalism has always been in conflict with the intuition that kith and kin have a moral priority over strangers; the twentieth-century inflection of moral universalism has taken the form of an anti-ideological and anti-political ethic of siding with the victim; the moral risk entailed by this ethic is misanthropy, a risk and a temptation heightened by television's visual insistence on consequences rather than intentions.

It is time to focus more closely on television news itself, on the impact of its regimes of selection and presentation on the moral relation of viewers to the events it depicts. When we say that watching television is a passive experience, we mean, among other things, that we are unaware of the nature of the visual authority to which we are submitting. Television news is an extremely recent genre: the half-hour news we take for granted is barely twenty years old, and novelty itself may explain why its codes tend to register subliminally. With increasing familiarity, however, these codes tend to become more evident, more a matter of cultural discussion and interrogation. News is a genre as much as fiction or drama: it is a regime of visual authority, a coercive organization of images according to a stopwatch. Many conventions of television news are taken over from newspapers and radio: the convention that home news is more important than foreign news; that news is about what happened to "the nation" and "the world" in one day; that yesterday's news—yesterday's famine—is no longer news; that some news has to be good news, i.e., that broadcasts should discharge a certain function of good cheer in a cheerless world. To these existing conventions, television has applied two of its own: that news to be news at all must be visual and it must fit into fifteen-, thirty-, and sixty-minute formats. Some of the consequences of these conventions are notorious: the entire script content of the CBS nightly half-hour news would fit on three quarters of the front page of the *New York Times*. The promiscuity of the nightly news—the jostling together of tornadoes in Pennsylvania, gunmen in Beirut, striking teachers in Manchester, a royal outing in Suffolk, and infant heart surgery in a California hospital—is dictated by the time constraints of the me-

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dium. Yet this jumble of events is presented to the viewer as if it were a representation of the promiscuity of the external world. This incoherence is compounded by the growing importance, across all media, of human-interest stories. The growth of this dimension of the news might once have been understood as a populist counter-ballast to the dominance of official, governmental information. Yet this populist redefinition of news value to include the curious, bizarre, and the entertaining has destroyed the coherence of the genre itself so that thoughtful viewers of the news ask themselves at least once a night, "Why am I being shown this? Why is this news?"[16]

The myth sustaining the news is that it is a picture of what happened to "the nation" and "the world" in a given time period, usually the time since the last bulletin. Millions of households look out through the screen in search of their collective identity as a national society and as citizens of one world. The media now play the decisive role in constituting the "imagined community" of nation and globe, the myth that millions of separate "I"s find common identity in a "we." The fiction is that all the events depicted have somehow happened to "us." News editors act as ventriloquists of this "we," serving up a diet of information that is legitimized as being what "we" need to know; in fact, what we get to know is what fits the visual and chronological constraints of the genre. In this circular process, the news is validated as a system of authority, as a national institution with a privileged role as purveyor of the nation's identity and taker of its pulse.

Yet news is not only a system of authority, it is also the site of social competition among interest groups and individuals struggling to influence the representation of themselves in the eyes of the watching "we." The struggle over representation has become as important as the struggle for power; indeed, has become the privileged means by which interests fight for power itself. What was once called, in the nineteenth century, the battle for public opinion conducted within the relatively restricted press read by the middle and upper classes, has become a struggle for "coverage" on a nightly news with a massive and socially heterogeneous audience. Since public opinion polls now exist to aggregate individual reaction to this struggle, and since these opinion polls are watched attentively by those in power, the struggle for favorable media coverage has become the key battleground in elections, strikes, and charitable campaigns.

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In the process, the rationale for news decisions has been put under an intense degree of public scrutiny. Charges of bias are hurled from all sides of the political arena at media executives, while they in turn, faced with this pressure, lean heavily on their journalists to comply with rough and ready guidelines of balance.

This focus on political *bias* as the source of the media's distortion of the "we" leaves unaddressed the distorting effect of the news genre itself. News is a mythic narrative of social identity constituted from commodities bought and sold on the international market. The nightly news could be understood as a market in which startling and terrible images compete with each other for ninety-second slots in the bulletin. There is a market in images of horror as there is a market in grain or cameras, and there are those who specialize in the production and distribution of such images. Moral intuition might lead one to suppose that such a trade in images of suffering is immoral. There are many goods that are not traded, even in a capitalist culture—goods like health care, justice, and public office.[17] Though many societies have attempted to ban the traffic in images of degrading sexuality, few have attempted to restrict the commerce in images of human suffering. To ban a trade in images of suffering would be to exclude not only disturbing and casual atrocity footage, but also many of the masterpieces of Western art, including Goya's *Horrors of War,* or Picasso's *Guernica.* As long as culture itself is a process of market exchange between producers and consumers of images, and as long as we think it wrong for anyone to have the right to dictate the content of these images, then our culture will constantly have to confront the moral ambiguity of making commodities out of other people's pain. Some of the deep ambiguity at the heart of our discomfort in watching the scenes from Ethiopia comes from our knowledge that we are consuming images of other people's suffering, that our moral relations to them are mediated as consumption relations. The shame of voyeurism, therefore, in relation to their suffering has certain unchangeable elements that inhere in the nature of the consumption of representation itself.

Yet certain other components of our shame are susceptible to intervention, because they derive from the news genre itself. The pell-mell competition to fill the nightly news results in a blur of tragedies and crimes—one minute Afghanistan, the next minute Lebanon, then Ethiopia, or a bloody train wreck in Kansas—the

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cumulative effect of which is to create one single banalized commodity of horror. The time disciplines of the news genre militate against the minimum moral requirement of engagement with another person's suffering: that one spends time with them, time to learn, to suffer with, to pierce the carapace of self-absorption and estrangement that separates us from the moral worlds of others. Moral life is a struggle to see—a struggle against the desire to deny the testimony of one's own eyes and ears. The struggle to believe one's senses is at the heart of the process of moving from voyeurism to commitment. Visitors to the refugee camp at Korem have all insisted that, faced with the testimony of their senses, they found themselves fleeing mentally into the fantasy that what they were seeing was some terrible nightmare from which they would awake.[18] In the same way it is an effort to look at footage of Dachau and Belsen and not find oneself taking refuge in the thought that what one is seeing is just a piece of celluloid moving through a projector gate.

Goya's *Horrors of War* and Picasso's *Guernica* confront this desire to evade the testimony of our own eyes by grounding horror in aesthetic forms that force the spectator to see it as if for the first time. There is no reason to suppose that the new media lack the same capacity of representation to make the real truly real and to force the eye to see, and the heart to recognize what it has seen. Yet the nightly rhythm of the news militates against this kind of seeing. In the mingling of heterogeneous stories, and in the enforcement of the regime of time, the news makes it impossible to attend to what one has seen. In the end one sees only the news, its personalities, its rules of selection and suppression, its authoritative voice. In the end, the subject of the news is the news itself: what it depicts is a means to the reproduction of its own authoritativeness. In this worship of itself, of its speed, its immense news-gathering resources, its capacity to beat the clock, the news turns realities like Ethiopia into ninety-second exercises in its own style of representation.

A dishonor is done when the flow of television news reduces all the world's horror to identical commodities. In a culture overwhelmed by the volume of promiscuous representation, there must be some practice by which the real—the instant when a real body is struck, abused, or violated—is given a place of special attention, a demarcation that insists that it be *seen*. Anthropologists would call such practices rituals.[19] While it is often said that modern culture is

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impoverished in sacred ritual, this is not exactly the case. It certainly has its own fetishisms—money and consumption—and, for all the surface din of moral controversy, a generally shared belief in the special respect due the human person. The idea that the person is sacred, in property, rights, and life, is widely shared, if honored more in the breach than in the observance. Whether the world we live in is any more violent, any more full of suffering, is, in the nature of things, impossible to decide. What seems less disputable is that the culture is less able to satisfy human needs for an account of our dignity as creatures, less able to treat the human experience of violence and suffering with the respect it deserves: the respect of outrage. The violence and suffering of the world burst upon us with greater force not merely because global media no longer allow us the luxury of ignorance, but because we lack in the public realm those frames of interpretation and judgment which we use in private life to give meaning to our own experience.

The sceptic might well reply that if the television audience wants moral reassurance it should turn to the churches: television's business is news, not piety; information, not sermons. The sacred is not its domain. This reply would be adequate if it were true, if television worshiped at no altars other than the search for information. The claim that television should pay some respect to suffering would be irrelevant if the medium paid no respect to anything at all. Yet while television news publicly adheres to the sceptic's code of honor—that nothing is sacred—in practice it worships power. Television is the church of modern authority. Consider, for example, the television broadcasts of the 1953 British Coronation, the funeral of John F. Kennedy, the funeral of Winston Churchill, or the marriage of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer. These are the sacred occasions of modern secular culture, and television has devised its own rhetoric and ritual to enfold viewers in a sense of the sacred importance of these moments: the hushed voices of the commentators; cameras so respectful of grief or majesty that they have the humility of pages; loving attention to uniform and vestments of power; above all, the tacit inference, throughout the commentary, that what is being represented is a rite of national significance.

The televised state pageant is the only occasion in which television executives feel able to jettison the regimes of the stopwatch which determine coverage of events like Ethiopia. In dispensing with

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advertising breaks, in scrapping schedules and in going on live, television makes an *awesome* assertion about what its audience wants to see. In the case of such events as royal marriages, for example, it presumes a universal identification with royalty which is at least contestable. The sacred function of these broadcasts is to constitute an event as being of "national" significance and thus to bind the competing "I"s of civil society into a momentary "we." Yet the "we" is asserted, rather than simply addressed. There are moments—the funeral of John F. Kennedy might be an example—when these practices attain the cathartic power of liturgy, and do seem to speak for an audience that, momentarily, does experience itself as one in grief. But there are other occasions—summits of world leaders, royal marriages—that many viewers regard as "non-events" and that are nonetheless treated to the sacred discourse of coverage. Such "media events" open up a gulf between the language of television and the watching audience. In this gulf it becomes possible to see that television is worshiping state power and insisting that we do so as well. It is power itself—the sacred offices of state—that is worshiped. The same medium subjects the holders of these offices to such searching and even contemptuous scrutiny that television could be said to consume those it covers. Any politician making a career in the television age is always dicing with the adage "familiarity breeds contempt." Television, however, is not contemptuous about power. Towards the handful of offices that rules the modern word, it displays a degree of humility that contradicts the journalist's code of honor, that nothing is sacred.

If, then, television is capable of treating power as sacred, it becomes plausible for us to ask it to treat suffering with equal respect. If television can jettison its schedules and transform its discourse for the sake of a wedding or a funeral, then we can ask it to do the same for a famine in which millions of people are at risk. If television does know how to liberate itself from the news regime, then it becomes possible to ask it to reconsider the adequacy of the news regime as a whole, not merely as a means of covering famines, but all news. It becomes slightly less utopian at least to pose the question whether television should have news at all. Serving up the world in ninety-second slices is, on television journalists' own admission, a poor second best to the explanatory power of a good newspaper. In moments of self-doubt and self-examination, good television journal-

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ists will admit that if the general population were entirely dependent on their nightly bulletin for their understanding of the world, they would be exceedingly poorly informed. Perhaps the logic of these doubts should be pushed further. Television does some things supremely well. It has adapted the documentary format from cinema to produce a style of feature reporting that in half-hour and hour-long segments has the time necessary both to inform and explain. The best documentaries sometimes achieve the prerequisite of moral vision itself; they force the spectator to see, to shed the carapace of cliche and to encounter alien worlds in all their mystery and complexity. There is almost never an occasion when the time formats of news bulletins allow even the best journalist to do the same. When the rules of a genre are in such contradiction to the needs and intentions of those trying to make best use of it, there is a case for scrapping the genre altogether. If the nightly news were replaced by magazine programs and documentary features with open-ended formats, the institutional preconditions for a journalism that respects itself and the terrible events it covers would begin to exist. Such a journalism would be forced to take the hardest part of a journalist's job—selection—very seriously. It would have to discard as many stories as it chose to cover, and it would have to change its conception of what a story is. It would have to challenge accepted definitions of newsworthiness to intervene before starvation becomes famine, before torture becomes genocide, before racial persecution becomes mass expulsion, and religious conflict becomes civil war. It would have to get to the scene, in other words, before the ambulances arrive. Such a journalism might then be able to challenge other coercive features of its own genre: for example, the newsroom rule of thumb that one British, American, or European life is worth—in news value—a hundred Asian or African lives.[19] As the charitable response to the images from the Ethiopia make plain, the medium itself is helping to generate an international awareness that has less and less patience with these kind of discriminations.

Utopian, no doubt. Yet let us at least be clear that the grounds for wishing this utopia into existence are moral. Whether it wishes or not, television has become the principal mediation between the suffering of strangers and the consciences of those in the world's few remaining zones of safety. No matter how assiduously its managers assert that the medium's function is merely informative, they cannot

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escape the moral consequences of their power. It has become not merely the means through which we see each other, but the means by which we shoulder each other's fate. If the regimes of representation by which it mediates these relations dishonor the suffering they depict, then the cost is not measured only in shame, but in human lives. For if we cease to care, not merely about their fate, but about how their fate and our obligations to them are represented in our culture, then it is they—the victims on the screens—not us, who will pay the heaviest price.

ENDNOTES

[1]Information on British response to the Ethiopian famine was provided by Oxfam's public relations department, Derek Warren, in particular. I wish to acknowledge their help in the preparation of this article.

[2]For an excellent study of television coverage of the Ethiopian famine, see William Boot, "Ethiopia: Feasting on Famine," *Columbia Journalism Review,* March–April 1985, pp. 47–49.

[3]On European natural law, see Richard Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought,* 2 vols, vol. 2 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Hugo Grotius, *Of the Law of War and Peace,* 3 vols. (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1927); Samuel Pufendorf, *The Elements of Natural Jurisprudence* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1931); see also Peter Stein, *Legal Evolution* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

[4]On the background to the rise of the idea of toleration, see Henry Kamen, *The Rise of Toleration* (London: Methuen, 1967); see also the excellent study by Elisabeth Labrousse, *Bayle* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1983); also the introduction to John Locke's *Epistola de Tolerantia* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1968); Richard Popkin, *History of Scepticism* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1979).

[5]Judith Shklar, *Ordinary Vices* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984); see also Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays,* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1965).

[6]David B. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975).

[7]See Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, eds., *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment,* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 1–45, for a detailed discussion of needs, rights, and entitlements in times of famine as treated in the theories of natural jurisprudence and early political economy. For modern treatments of these issues, see Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlements and Deprivation* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1981); also Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

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[8]See Karl Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State," "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," and "On the Jewish Question," in Lucio Colletti, ed., *Marx: Early Writings* (London: Penguin, 1975).

[9]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Humanisme et Terreur* (Paris: Plon, 1972).

[10]Roland Barthes, "The Great Family of Man," in *Mythologies* (London: Fontana, 1973); see also Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Allen Lane, 1978); John Berger "Photographs of Agony," in *About Looking* (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

[11]On the background to the famine, see Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux, *The Ethiopian Revolution* (London: Verso, 1983); see also the brilliant portrait of Haile Selassie in R. Kapuscinski, *The Emperor* (London: Picador, 1983); Graham Hancock, *Ethiopia: The Challenge of Hunger* (London: Gollancz, 1985).

[12]This theme is developed further in my own *The Needs of Strangers* (New York: Viking, 1985).

[13]Hancock, op.cit., chap. 1.

[14]Amnesty International, *Report on Torture* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1975).

[15]Don McCullin "A Life in Photographs," *Granta,* Winter 1985, p. 188.

[16]On the regimes of television news coverage, see Anthony Smith, *The Shadow in the Cave* (London: MacMillan, 1973), chap. 3; also Philip Schlesinger, *Putting Reality Together: The BBC News* (London: MacMillan, 1978).

[17]On market goods and public goods, see the excellent discussion in Michael Walzer's *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (Oxford, England: Martin Robertson, 1983), chap. 4. On the nation as an "imagined community," see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

[18]Hancock, op.cit., p. 95.

[19]On the sacred, see Marcel Gauchet, *Le desenchantement du monde: une histoire politique de la religion* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985); also on the sacred in contemporary political life, see Regis Debray, *Critique of Political Reason* (London: Verso, 1983); on the sacred in general, see Leszek Kolakowski, *Religion* (London: Fontana, 1983).

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Noël Carroll

The Power of Movies

FOR MUCH OF ITS HISTORY, film theory has been obsessed with various notions of realism. In what has come to be called classical film theory, i.e., film theory until 1965, the writings of André Bazin evince the extreme form of this obsession. Bazin held that the film image was an objective re-presentation of the past, a veritable slice of reality.[1] In addition to this view of the ontology of film, Bazin also advanced the psychological corollary that spectators somehow regard the images on screen as identical with their referents. Contemporary film theorists reject Bazin's metaphysics concerning the nature of the film image; influenced by semiotics, such theorists deny there is any literal sense to be made of the idea that film is some kind of natural mirror onto reality. Yet contemporary film theorists do hold onto a portion of the realist approach, notably its psychological presuppositions. That is, contemporary theorists, while rejecting the notion that film is a slice of reality, nevertheless agree that in its standard uses, film imparts a *realistic effect* to its viewers. This effect, a psychological effect, is described by various formulas, including the notions that film gives the impression of reality narrating itself; film causes an illusion of reality; or film appears natural.[2]

Surely, contemporary theorists are correct in forsaking the extravagances of Bazin's ontology of film, the great influence of his theory notwithstanding. However, contemporary film theory's psychologizing of the realist approach, in terms of realist effects, is not very persuasive. For it requires attributing rather bizarre and frankly dubious mental states to spectators. Spectators are said to be under the illusion that the film image is its referent; or we are thought to

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believe that the film image is reality narrating itself; or that the film image is somehow natural. Some of these imputed psychological effects—for example, "reality narrating itself"—sound downright incoherent. But all of these variations on the realistic effect are suspect because they attribute to spectators states of belief that would preclude our characteristic forms of response to, and appreciation of, cinema. For, were we spectators ever to mistake the representations before us for the referents those images portray, we could not sit by comfortably, inactively, and appreciatively while buffaloes stampede toward us, while lovers reveal their deepest longings to each other, and while children are tortured.[3]

The realist approach to film theory, either as an ontological thesis or in its more contemporary, psychologized variations, is a dead end. However, *the questions that motivated the realist answers may well* be worth asking. That is, what is it that the various realist approaches in film theory are designed to explain, and is it worth explaining? At least two candidates seem key here. Realism, especially as a psychological effect, is supposed to play a role in explaining the way in which film disseminates ideology, according to contemporary film theorists. Second, the attribution of realism is meant to explain the power of movies, to explain why the moving picture, including narrative TV, is *the* dominant art form of the twentieth century.

Certainly, "How does cinema promote ideology?" and "What makes movies powerful?" are good questions. The purpose of this paper is to attempt to answer the second question, without resorting to the invocation of realism.[4] We shall try to explain what makes motion pictures our dominant mass art, one that is so widespread, internationally pervasive, and accessible across boundaries of class and culture. We shall furthermore attempt to explain what makes the response to movies *so intense for so many,* especially when compared to art forms such as opera and theater.

The hypothesis of realism was meant to deal with such questions by suggesting that since films appear to be slices of reality, they are widely accessible insofar as everyone is familiar with reality. But the reference to reality here won't give us much help with the intensity of our response to movies, because in large measure we conceive of the special intensity of movies exactly in contrast to our more diffuse responses to quotidian reality. Another way to put this, of course, is to point out that since our response to reality is so often lackluster,

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claiming that a film appears to be a slice of reality promises no explanation of our extraordinarily intense response to films. So another explanation, one not reliant upon realism, must be found to account for the power of movies.

To begin an account of the power of movies, some characterization of the phenomenon in question is relevant. First, the word "movies," as used here, does not refer to film or cinema at large—that is, to a body of cultural productions that includes, not only commercial, narrative films, but also industrial documentaries, medical training films, ballistics tests, experimental films, modernist art films, propaganda films, and so on. Rather, "movies" refers to popular mass-media films, the products of what might be called Hollywood International—films made in what has been dubbed the "classical style," whether they be American, Italian, or Chinese, and whether they be made for the screen or for TV. Movies, in this sense, are a genre, not the whole, of cinema. It is about this genre's power that my paper is concerned. Why speak of the power of a genre of cinema rather than of the power of the medium? Well, the answer to that is simply that the medium of cinema is not, in and of itself, powerful; it is not the medium of cinema that has gripped such widespread audiences so intensely. Instead, it is the adaptation of the medium to the purposes of Hollywood International. When people speak of the power of the medium, they are, I believe, talking about the power of this particular genre or style. For it is the movies, and not modernist masterpieces or medical instruction films, that have captivated the twentieth-century popular imagination. It is the power of movies about which researchers are really curious.

To speak of movies rather than film or cinema deliberately eschews essentialism. Posing the problem in an essentialist idiom—i.e., what makes the *medium* of cinema powerful—would pervert the question. For neither the medium nor every style of film found in it is accessible to or intensely engaging of mass, popular audiences. Thus, plumbing the essence of the medium, if there is such a thing, would not provide the information we seek. Instead of comparing the medium of film to other media such as theater or literature, then, this paper will focus on the *genre of movies* in order to determine just what features of the stylistic choices of Hollywood International enable it to evoke a level of widespread, intensive engagement that is, ex hypothesis, unrivaled

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by other media. Indeed, this way of stating the project is not quite accurate; for it is not the case that the genre of movies is really to be contrasted with other media, but rather that movies will be contrasted with other *genres* within other media. We want to know what features of movies like *Red River, Psycho,* and *Blue Thunder* make them more appealing and more intensely engaging for mass audiences than, for example, plays like *King Lear* and *Hurlyburly,* ballets like *Giselle,* and novels like *Middlemarch.* My anti-essentialism amounts to a refusal to answer questions about the power of movies in terms of the specificity of the medium of cinema. It may seem that proclaiming this variety of anti-essentialism at this late date is so much redundant arm-waving. But I'm not sure. The influence of Christian Metz's recent essay, "The Imaginary Signifier," which proceeds methodologically in an essentialist manner, trying to isolate and analyze a cinema-specific feature of the medium which he identifies as a special sort of play of presence and absence, testifies to the persistent appeal of the essentialist approach.[5]

The power of movies comprises two factors: widespread engagement and intense engagement. This paper will attempt to explain the former in terms of those features of movies that make them highly accessible to broad audiences. It will also try to explain the intensity of movies by examining those features that enable movies to depict a very high degree of clarity. In a nutshell, its thesis is that the power of movies resides in their easily graspable clarity for mass audiences.

We can begin to understand the general popularity of the movie genre by considering those features that make it generally accessible to mass, untutored audiences. A good place to start this investigation is with the image projected by the single-shot—a close-up of the hero's face, or a long-view of Castle Dracula. These images are, for the most part, representational, but, more important, they are *pictorial* representations. They refer to their referents by way of *picturing,* by displaying or manifesting a delimited range of resemblances to their referents. By recognizing these similarities, the spectator comes to know what the picture depicts, whether a man, a horse, a house, and so on.

Given that the typical movie image is a pictorial representation, what has this to do with accessibility? Well, a picture is a very special sort of symbol. Psychological evidence strongly supports the contention that we learn to recognize what a picture stands for as soon as we

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have become able to recognize the objects, or kinds of objects, that serve as the models for that picture. Picture recognition is not a skill acquired over and above object recognition. Whatever features or cues we come to employ in object recognition, we also mobilize to recognize what pictures depict. A child raised without pictorial representations will, after being shown a couple of pictures, be able to identify the referent of any picture of an object with which he or she is familiar.[6] The rapid development of this picture-recognition capacity contrasts strongly with the acquisition of a symbol system such as language. Upon mastering a couple of words, the child is nowhere near mastering the entire language. Similarly, when an adult is exposed to one or two representational *pictures* in an alien pictorial idiom, say a Westerner confronting a Japanese image in the floating-point-of-view style, he will be able to identify the referent of any picture in that format after studying one or two representations of that sort for a few moments. But no Westerner, upon learning one or two linguistic symbols of the Japanese language, could go on to identify the reference of all, or even merely a few more, Japanese words. Moreover, historically the Japanese were eminently able to catch on to and replicate the Western system of perspectival picturing by examining a selection of book illustrations; but they could never have acquired any European language by learning the meanings of just a few words or phrases.[7]

Pictorial representations thus differ radically from linguistic representations. The speed with which the former is mastered suggests that it does not require special learning, above the realization, perhaps, that flat surfaces are being used to stand for three-dimensional objects. Rather, the capacity to recognize what a picture depicts emerges in tandem with the capacity to recognize the kind of object that serves as the model of the picture. The reciprocal relation between picture recognition and object recognition, of course, explains how it is possible for us, having acquired detailed visual information from pictures, to recognize objects and places we have never encountered in real life. And, of course, the fact that pictorial recognition does not require any special learning process would also explain how movies, whose basic constituent symbols are pictures, are immediately accessible to *untutored* audiences in every corner of the world. These audiences do not need any special training to deal with the basic images in movies, for the capacity to recognize what

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these images are about has evolved part and parcel with the viewer's capacity to recognize objects and events.

The technology of film could be adapted in such a way that the basic images of a film genre or film style were not pictorial representations. One could imagine a motion picture industry of changing abstract forms, after the fashion of Hans Richter's *Rhythmus 21,* or one of spectacles of color, such as Stan Brakhage's *Text of Light.* But that was not the road taken by the movies. Movies became a worldwide phenomenon—and a lucrative industry—precisely because in their exploitation of pictorial recognition—as opposed to symbol systems that require mastery of processes such as reading, decoding, or deciphering in order to be understood—they rely on a biological capability that is nurtured in humans as they learn to identify the objects and events in their environment.

The basic images in movies are not simply pictorial representations; they are, standardly, *moving* pictorial representations. But just as an audience need not go through a process of learning to "read" pictures, neither is its perception of movie "movement" learned. Rather, it is a function of the way stroboscopic or beta phenomena affect the brain's organization of congruous input presented in specifiable sequences to different points on the retina. Of course, following a movie involves much more than the capacity to recognize what its moving images represent. But we should not overlook the crucial role that the relative ease of comprehending the basic symbols of movies plays in making movies readily accessible.

The remarks thus far are apt to displease the majority of cinema researchers. For the contention that pictures (and, by extension, moving pictures) work by looking like their referents in those pertinent respects to which our perceptual system is keyed, goes against the contemporary received wisdom that pictures, like any other symbol, are matters of codes and conventions. Undoubtedly, some reader will recall an anthropology class in which he was told that certain non-Western peoples were unable to understand pictures shown to them by missionaries and other field workers. However, this evidence has never been entirely decisive. Complaints about the fidelity of the photographs involved have been raised, along with the more serious objection that what the subjects failed to understand, and then only initially, was the practice of using flat surfaces to portray three-dimensional objects.[8] Once they got the hang of that,

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they had no trouble in recognizing what hitherto unseen pictures referred to—assuming they were familiar with the kinds of objects displayed in the pictures.[9] Also, on the non-conventionalist side of the scale, we must weigh the psychological evidence of the child's acquisition of pictorial recognition, the easy cross-cultural dissemination of pictorial practices, and the zoological evidence that certain animals have the capacity for pictorial recognition,[10] against exotic anecdotes that are meant to demonstrate that the practices of picturing are cultural conventions that must be learned in the fashion of a language. We can consider our own cases. We all recall our own language acquisition, and we know how to go about helping youngsters to learn to speak and to read. But who remembers undergoing a similar process in regard to pictures, and what techniques would we employ to teach a youngster pictorial literacy? Yes, we may show a child a few pictures and say the name of the object portrayed. But very shortly the child just sees what the picture is of; the child doesn't "read" the picture or decode it or go through some process of inference. And from a meager set of samples, the child can proceed to identify the subjects of a plethora of pictures, because there is a continuum between apprehending pictorial representations and perceiving the world that does not depend upon learning anything like the conventional, arbitrary correlations of a vocabulary, or the combinatory principles of a grammar.

There is undoubtedly a temptation to think that picture recognition involves some process of decoding or inference because of the contemporary influence of the computational metaphor of the mind. We think that computers supply us with powerful insight into how the mind works. And if we were to build a computer to simulate pictorial recognition, it would require a complex information-processing system. But it does not follow that if computers employ complex information-processing systems in pictorial recognition, then humans must likewise possess such systems. It may rather be that our neurophysiology is so constructed that when stimulated by certain pictorial arrays, we see what the picture is of. John Searle notes that balance is controlled by the fluids in our inner ear. Were a robot to be built, balance would probably be governed by some complex computational program. But, for us, balance is a matter governed by our fleshy hardware.[11] A similar case might be made that biology—rather than information processing—may have a great

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deal to tell us about the workings of object recognition and picture recognition. And to the extent that pictorial representation is a matter of the way in which humans are made, a practice rooted in pictorial representation—such as the movies—will be widely and easily accessible to all humans made that way.

Many contemporary semiotically inclined film theorists resist approaching pictorial representation in the movies in the preceding fashion. Their resistance rests on a confusion, or rather a conflation, on their part of the ideas of code, convention, and culture; terms that in film studies are treated as equivalent. If something is coded or conventional, then it is regarded as a cultural production. This seems fair enough. But it is more problematic to presume, as film researchers do, the opposite; that if something is a cultural product, then it is an example of coded or conventional phenomena. Thus, if pictorial representations, including moving, pictorial representations, are cultural productions, which they certainly are, then they must be conventional. The difficulty here lies in the assumption that everything that is cultural is necessarily conventional.

Consider plows. They are cultural productions. They were produced by certain agricultural civilizations that had culturally specific needs not shared, for example, by hunter-gatherers. Is the design of a plow a matter of convention? Recall, here, that for semiotic film theorists, arbitrariness is a key defining feature of a convention. That is, a group creates a convention—like driving on the right side of the road—when there are a number of alternative ways of dealing with the situation *and* when the choice between these alternatives is arbitrary, a matter of fiat. But the adoption of the design of the plow could not have been reached by fiat. The plow had a purpose—digging furrows—and its effectiveness had to be accommodated to the structure of nature. It would have to be heavy enough and sharp enough to cut into the earth, and it had to be adapted to the capacities of its human users—it had to be steerable and pullable by creatures like us with two arms and limited strength. A device such as a plow had to be discovered; it could not be brought into existence by consensus. We could not have elected pogo-sticks to do the work of plows. The plow was a cultural *in*vention, not a cultural *con*vention. It was adopted because it worked, because it met a cultural need by accommodating features of nature and biology.

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The point of introducing the concept of a *cultural invention* here is, of course, to block the facile identification of the cultural and the conventional. Applied to the sort of pictorial representations found in movies, this concept suggests that pictorial representations may be cultural inventions, inventions that, given the way people are built, cause spectators who are untrained in any system of conventions to recognize what pictures stand for. The structure of such images is not determinable by a mere decision. Given the constraints of the human perceptual apparatus, we cannot decree that anything *looks like* anything else, though we may decree that anything can *stand for* anything else. It seems cogent to suppose that this limitation is in large measure attributable to human biology. And insofar as movies are constituted of a mode of representation connected to biological features of the human organism, they will be generally more accessible than genres in other media, such as the novel, that presuppose the mastery of learned conventions such as specific natural languages. Also, if the recognition of movie images is more analogous to a reflex than it is to a process like reading, then following a movie may turn out to be less taxing, less a matter of active effort, than reading. Perhaps this can be confirmed by recalling how much easier it is to follow a movie when one is fatigued than it is to read a novel.

The claim has so far been made that a crucial element in the power of movies is the fact that movies usually rely, in terms of their basic imagery, on pictorial representations that allow masses of untutored spectators easy access to the fundamental symbols in the system, due to the way humans are constructed. But is this not just a reversion to the kind of realist explanation we began by dismissing? Not at all. The Bazinian claims that the spectator somehow takes the film image to be identical with its referent, while contemporary film theorists hold that the typical film image imparts the illusion of reality, transparency, or naturalness. This paper, though, has not invoked any of these realist, psychological effects, nor anything like them. It has instead claimed that the untutored spectator recognizes what the film image represents without reference to a code; it has *not* claimed that the spectator takes the pictorial representation to be, in any sense, its referent. Man's perceptual capacities evolve in such a way that his capacity for pictorial recognition comes, almost naturally, with his capacity for object recognition, and part of that capacity is the ability to differentiate pictures from their referents. Thus, we are

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not talking about a realist, psychological effect—the taking of a representation for its referent—but only about the capacity of movies to exploit generic, recognitional abilities. Another way to see the difference between this approach and that of the realists is to note how often their accounts of the power of movies emphasize the importance of the fact that movies are photographic, whereas in the account offered here the important technology for explaining the accessibility of movies is the non-cinema-specific technology of pictorial representation.

If up to this point anything can be said to have been demonstrated, then, admittedly, it must also be conceded that we are a good distance away from a full account of the power of movies. We have explained why movies are more accessible than genres like novels. But what features of movies account for their presumably superior accessibility and intensity in comparison with media and genres like drama, ballet, and opera, in which recognition of what the representations refer to is, like movies, typically not mediated by learned processes of decoding, reading, or inference? What standard features of movies differentiate them from the standard features of the presentation of plays, for example, in a way that make typical movies more accessible than typical theatrical performances? Our hypothesis is that due to certain devices developed early in the evolution of movies, the typical movie is, all things being equal, easier to follow than the typical play, i.e., theatrical performances as have so far been commonly encountered. This caveat is added because there is no reason to believe that theatrical devices that would be functionally equivalent to the movie devices about to be discussed could not be invented, thus changing the relative accessibility of typical movies and typical plays. Our anti-essentialist bias, however, demands that we not compare the eternal essence of the film medium with its putative theatrical counterpart, but rather the state of the art of movies with the state of the art of theatrical production.

Movies are said to be more accessible than plays. What does this mean? We have asserted that movies are easier to follow than plays. What is it that is distinctive about the way in which spectators follow movies? With the typical movie, given certain of its characteristic devices, notably variable framing, the movie viewer is generally in a position where he or she is attending to exactly what is significant in the action-array or spectacle on screen. Another way of getting at this

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point is to say that the filmmaker in the movie genre has far more potential control over the spectator's attention than does the theatrical director. The consequence of this is that the movie spectator is always looking where he or she should be looking, always attending to the right details and thereby comprehending, nearly effortlessly, the ongoing action precisely in the way it is meant to be understood. Due to various devices, such as variable framing, movies are easier to follow and, therefore, more accessible than theatrical productions because movies are more perspicuous cognitively. The element of cognitive clarity afforded by movies may well account, too, for the widespread intensity of engagement that movies elicit.

Of course, movies and standard theatrical productions share many of the same devices for directing the audience's attention. Both in the medium-long shot and on the proscenium stage, the audience's attention can be guided by: the central positioning of an important character; movement in stasis; stasis in movement; characters' eyelines; light colors on dark fields; dark colors on light fields; sound, notably dialogue; spotlighting and variable illumination of the array; placement of important objects or characters along arresting diagonals; economy of set details; makeup and costume; commentary; gestures; and so on. But movies appear to have further devices and perhaps more effective devices for directing attention than does theater as it is presently practiced. The variability of focus in film, for example, is a more reliable means of making sure that the audience is looking where the spectator "ought" to be looking than is theatrical lighting. Even more important is the use in movies of variable framing. Through cutting and camera movement, the filmmaker can rest assured that the spectator is perceiving exactly what she should be perceiving at the precise moment she should be perceiving it. When the camera comes in for a close-up, for example, there is no possibility that the spectator can be distracted by some detail stage-left. Everything extraneous to the story at that point is deleted. Nor does the spectator have to find the significant detail; it is delivered to her. The viewer also gets as close or as far-off a view of the significant objects of the story—be they heroines, butcher knives, mobs, fortresses, or planets—as is useful for her to have a concrete sense of what is going on. Whereas in a theater the eye constantly tracks the action—often at a felt distance, often amidst a vaulting space—in movies much of that work is done by shifting camera

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positions, which at the same time also assures that the average viewer has not gotten lost in the space but is looking precisely at that which she is supposed to see. Movies are therefore easier to follow than typical stage productions, because the shifting camera positions make it practically impossible for the movie viewer *not* to be attending where she is meant to attend.

Variable framing in film is achieved by moving the camera closer or farther away from the objects being filmed. Cutting and camera movement are the two major processes for shifting framing: in the former, the actual process of the camera's change of position is not included in the shot; we jump from medium-range views, to close views, to far-off views with the traversal of the space between excised; in camera movement, as the name suggests, the passage of the camera from a long view to a close view is recorded within the shot. Reframing can also be achieved optically through devices such as zooming-in and changing lenses. These mechanical means for changing the framing of an on-screen object or event give rise to three formal devices for directing the movie audience's attention: indexing, bracketing, and scaling. Indexing occurs when a camera is moved toward an object. The motion toward the object functions ostensively, like the gesture of pointing. It indicates that the viewer ought to be looking in the direction the camera is moving, if the camera's movement is being recorded, or in the direction toward which the camera is aimed or pointing, if we have been presented with the shot via a cut.

When a camera is moved towards an array, it screens out everything beyond the frame. To move a camera toward an object either by cutting or camera movement generally has the force of indicating that what is important at this moment is what is on screen, what is in the perimeter of the frame. That which is not inside the frame has been *bracketed,* excluded. It should not, and in fact it literally cannot, at the moment it is bracketed, be attended to. At the same time, bracketing has an inclusionary dimension, indicating that what is inside the frame or bracket is important. A standard camera position will mobilize both the exclusionary and inclusionary dimensions of the bracket to control attention, though the relative degree may vary as to whether a given bracketing is more important for what it excludes, rather than what it includes, and vice-versa.

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There is also a standard deviation from this use of bracketing. Often the important element of a scene is placed outside the frame so that it is not visible onscreen, e.g., the child-killer in the early part of Fritz Lang's *M*. Such scenes derive a great deal of their expressive power just because they subvert the standard function of bracketing.

As the camera is moved forward, it not only indexes and places brackets around the objects in front of it; it also changes their scale. Whether by cutting or camera movement, as the camera nears the gun on the table, the gun simultaneously appears larger and occupies more screen space. When the camera is pulled away from the table, the gun occupies less screen space. This capacity to change the scale of objects through camera positioning—a process called "scaling"—can be exploited for expressive or magical effects. Scaling is also a lever for directing attention. Enlarging the screen size of an object generally has the force of stating that this object, or gestalt of objects, is the important item to attend to at this moment in the movie.

Scaling, bracketing, and indexing are three different ways of directing the movie spectator's attention through camera positioning. In general, a standard camera positioning, whether executed by cutting or camera movement, will employ all three of these means. But one can easily think of scenes in which the bracket is reoriented, but the scaling stays effectively the same, for example, a lateral pan as a character walks toward the edge of the frame. Likewise, a camera movement might be important for what it indexes rather than for whatever changes occur in the bracketing or the scaling: there are moving shots in the early Italian film *Cabiria,* for example, where the camera nudges a few feet forward in a spectacle scene in order to point the viewer's eye in a certain direction, though neither the bracket nor the scale of the objects in the scene are changed appreciably. Both the swamp scene and the trolley-car scene in *Sunrise* are artistically important for the way in which they call attention to the bracket, rather than for their scaling or indexing. However, bracketing, scaling, and indexing can be employed in tandem, and when they are, they afford very powerful means by which the movie-maker controls the audience's attention. We suddenly see a close-up of a gun, indexed, scaled, and bracketed as the important object in the scene, and then the bracket is changed—we see a medium shot in which the gun is being pointed at the heroine by the villain, telling us that now the important thing about the gun is its

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role within this newly framed context or gestalt. The constant reframing of the action that is endemic to movies enables the spectator to follow the action perfectly, and, so to say, automatically.

Adaptations of stage technology, of course, could probably establish theatrical means that would be functionally equivalent to the scaling, bracketing, and indexing functions of movies. Magnifying mirrors might be used to enlarge stage details at appropriate moments; the leg curtains could be motorized to constantly reframe the action; and indexing might be approximated by use of revolving stages that rotate the important characters and actions toward the audience. If these devices were not too distracting in and of themselves, they might provide the theater director with attentional levers that are functionally equivalent to scaling, bracketing, and indexing. However, these devices are not customary in theater as we presently know it, and our project here is to contrast movies as they are with theater as it currently is.

Of course, *films* can be made without variable framing; but *movies* rely on variable framing to automatize the spectator's attention. Also, variable framing is not unique to movies; other film genres employ it. Yet it is key to why movies are accessible; as we have noted, it contributes to the intensity of engagement movies promote. Through variable framing, the director assures that the spectator is attending where and when she should. The action and its details unfold in such a way that every element that is relevant is displayed at a distance that makes it eminently recognizable and, in a sequence that is intelligible. Ideally, variable framing allows us to see just what we need to see at changing distances and at cadences that render the action perspicuous. The action is analytically broken down into its most salient elements, distilled, that is, in a way that makes it extremely legible. This kind of clarity, which is bequeathed to the audience automatically by variable framing, contrasts strongly with the depiction of action in theatrical representations. There, the depiction is not analytic but a matter of physical enactment, generally occurring in something approximating real time, and presented at a fixed distance to each viewer. Of course, theatrical action is abstracted, simplified, for the sake of legibility, often employing emblematic gestures. It is clearer, that is, than the actions we encounter in everyday life. But theatrical action is not as clear and analytically distinct as movie action as portrayed by variable framing. Movie action, given the way

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it can be organized through camera positioning, is also far more intelligible than the unstaged events we witness in everyday life. This is an important feature that helps account for the way in which movies grip us.

Our experience of actions and events in movies differs radically from our normal experiences; movie actions and events are so organized, so automatically intelligible, and so clear. The arresting thing about movies, *contra* realist theories, is not that they create the illusion of reality, but that they reorganize and construct, through variable framing, actions and events with an economy, legibility, and coherence that are not only automatically available, but which surpass, in terms of their immediately perceptible basic structure, naturally encountered actions and events. Movie actions evince visible order and identity to a degree not found in everyday experience. This quality of uncluttered clarity gratifies the mind's quest for order, thereby intensifying our engagement with the screen.

So far, our speculations about the sources of the power of movies have been restricted to what would have classically been considered the medium's "cinematic features": pictorial representation and variable framing. This, of course, does not reflect a belief that these elements are uniquely cinematic, but only that they are features that help account for movies' power, the capacity to engender what appears to be an unprecedentedly widespread and intense level of engagement. There is another core defining features of what we are calling movies that needs to be treated: this is that they are fictional narratives. The question naturally arises to what degree this fact about movies can help explain their power.

The fact that movies tend to be narrative, concerned primarily with depictions of human actions, immediately suggests one of the reasons they are accessible. For narrative is, in all probability, our most pervasive and familiar means of explaining human action. If you ask me why George is watering the tulips, I may answer that George intends to have, or wants, a beautiful garden, and that he believes that he can't have a beautiful garden unless he waters the tulips. So I say he undertakes to water the tulips. You might ask me how he formed the desire to have a beautiful garden. I may refer to either his belief that this is a means to being a good citizen or his guilt about never caring for his father's garden, or both if his action is overdetermined. If you ask, where did he get the notion that the

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garden would not be beautiful unless he watered it, I say he read it in a book called *Beautiful Gardens* on May 17, 1953. Now if we tried to sum up this somewhat banal explanation of George's action, a narrative would probably be the likeliest, though not the only, means of organizing our information: George, racked with guilt feelings about his father's tulips and convinced that a beautiful garden is a means to the coveted ideal of good citizenship, decided to have a beautiful garden; and when he read, on May 17, 1953, that such gardens could not be had without watering the tulips, he went out and watered the tulips (on May 18). We might add that he continued to do so happily ever after. Insofar as this sort of narrative is one of the most common forms of human explanation, and insofar as much movie narration belongs to this category, movies will be familiar and accessible. Moreover, the explanatory quality of such narration will also contribute to the clarity of movies.

Of course, the logical relations that subtend this sort of narrative, at crucial points, remind one, and are parasitic upon, those of practical inference. If I am George, for example, I reason thusly: I want a beautiful garden; I do not believe I can secure a beautiful garden unless I water the tulips; therefore, I proceed to water the tulips. What makes narratives of the sort that I told above explanatory is that they, at nodal moments, reflect processes of practical reasoning. Practical reasoning is part of everyone's life. And the actions of others are intelligible to me when I can see them as consequences of the sort of practical reasoning I employ. Insofar as movie narratives depict the human actions of characters in forms that are reflective of the logic of practical inference, the movies will be widely accessible, since practical inference is a generic form of human decision-making.

Undoubtedly, this discussion of narrative may be too broad and too abstract to be of much use to the film analyst. In all probability nothing of great interest would be gained in film studies by showing that a series of scenes reflected a series of practical inferences on the part of characters. Rather, the film scholar will be interested in an analysis of the characteristic forms of plotting found in movies; she will want these described more specifically than they were in the preceding discussion. And she will want to know what it is about these forms, if anything, that contributes to the power of movies.

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In a recent paper on film suspense,[12] I attempted to identify what I think is the most basic form of movie plotting, and I would like to take advantage of those speculations now. My position owes a great deal to the Soviet filmmaker and theoretician V.I. Pudovkin.[13] Pudovkin, like his teacher, L. Kuleshov, studied American movies, contrasting them with Russian films in order to discern what made the American films of the twenties more effective on popular audiences than were comparable Russian films. Pudovkin and Kuleshov undertook this investigation, of course, in order to calculate the best means for creating a new Soviet cinema for the masses. The theories of filmmaking they produced were meant to instruct other filmmakers in technique and praxis. As is well known, Pudovkin and Kuleshov tended to become very prescriptive in these matters, a tendency for which they have been duly chastised ever since. But whatever their dogmatism, we should not overlook the fact that beneath their debatable prescriptions about the way films should be made, they often had valuable insights into the way in which popular films, especially Hollywood movies, were actually constructed. What Pudovkin has to say about movie narration is a case in point.

A story film will portray a sequence of scenes or events, some appearing earlier, some later. A practical problem that confronts the filmmaker is the way in which these scenes are to be connected, i.e., what sort of relation the earlier scenes should bear to the later ones. Pudovkin recommends—as a primary, though not exclusive, solution—that earlier scenes be related to later scenes as questions are to answers. If a giant shark appears offshore, unbeknownst to the local authorities, and begins to ravage lonely swimmers, this scene or series of scenes (or this event or series of events) raises the question of whether the shark will ever be detected. This question is likely to be answered in some later scene when someone figures out why all those swimmers are missing. At that point, when it is learnt that the shark is very, very powerful and nasty to boot, the question arises about whether it can be destroyed or driven away. The ensuing events in the film serve to answer that question. Or, if some atomic bombs are skyjacked in the opening scenes, this generates questions about who stole them and for what purposes. Once the generally nefarious purposes of the hijacking are established, the question arises concerning whether these treacherous intents can be thwarted. Or, for a slightly more complicated scenario, shortly after a jumbo jet takes off,

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we learn that the entire crew has just died from food poisoning while also learning that the couple in first class is estranged. These scenes raise the questions of whether the plane will crash and whether the couple in first class will be reconciled by their common ordeal. Maybe we also ask whether the alcoholic priest in coach will find God again. It is the function of the later scenes in the film to answer these questions.

Of course, the narrative organization of Hollywood films is far more complex than these examples suggest, and I have tried to develop this subject with more precision elsewhere.[14] For present purposes, let us say that, as is suggested by the writings of Pudovkin, the core narrative structures of Hollywood-type films—the movies discussed in this paper—involve generating questions that ensuing scenes answer. Not all narrative films employ this approach. Often, modernist films generate questions—e.g., did I meet her at Marienbad before?—without supplying any answers. Or, I might chronicle my day at the beach: first I had a hot dog, then I put on suntan lotion, then I swam, then I went home. Surely we can conceive of a home movie like this, where none of the early scenes raised any questions, and where none of the later ones supplied any answers. Thus, to narrate by generating questions internal to the film that subsequent scenes answer is a distinctive form of narration. Admittedly, this is not a form unique to films or movies, for it is also exploited in mystery novels, adventure stories, Harlequin romances, Marvel comics, and so on. Nevertheless, it is the most characteristic narrative approach in movies.

How can this be proven? The best suggestion one can make here is to embrace the question/answer model of movie narration—what I call the *erotetic* model of narrative—and then turn on your TV, watch old movies and new ones, TV adventure series and romances, domestic films and foreign popular films. Ask yourself why the later scenes in the films make sense in the context of the earlier scenes. My prediction is that you will be surprised by the extent to which later scenes are answering questions raised earlier, or are at least providing information that will contribute to such answers. In adopting the hypothesis that the narrative structure of a randomly selected movie is fundamentally a system of internally generated questions that the movie goes on to answer, you will find that you have hold of a relationship that enables you to explain what makes certain scenes

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especially key: they either raise questions or answer them, or perform related functions including sustaining questions already raised, or incompletely answering a previous question, or answering one question but then introducing a new one.

Apart from the confirmation of the hypothesis afforded by this confrontation with empirical data, further support for the question/answer model might be gained by using it, not to analyze, but to develop movie scenarios. For when certain complexities and qualifications are added to the model of the erotetic narrative, it is a very serviceable guide for producing stories that strike one as typically "movieish," especially in their economy. Partial confirmation of the question/answer model is its capacity to direct the simulation of movie scenarios.

If the model of the erotetic narrative captures the characteristic narrative form of movies, then perhaps we can note certain features of this mode of narration which will shed light on the power of movies. A movie scene or a series of depicted events make certain questions salient. An orphan wanders the street, importuning adults needfully. Will the orphan find a surrogate parent? This could be answered in the next scene, or it could take the entire film to answer. However, by characterizing the function of this scene as that of saliently posing a question, we have put ourselves in a position to account for one of the most notable features of audience responses to linear narrative movies, that is, expectation. Given the erotetic model, we can say what it is that audiences expect: they expect answers to the questions that earlier events have made salient—will the shark be stopped; will the jumbo jet crash? If it is a general feature of our cognitive make-up that, all things being equal, we not only want but expect answers to questions that have assertively been put before us, this helps explain our widespread, intense engagement with movies. Even if the question is as insignificant to us as whether the suburban adolescent in *Risky Business* will be found out by his parents, our curiosity keeps us riveted to the screen until it is satisfied.

Though space does not allow for a full elaboration of the matter, important distinctions can be made among the different types of questions that animate the erotetic movie narrative. One such distinction can be drawn between micro-questions and macro-questions. A scene or an event may raise a question that is immediately answered in the succeeding scene or by the succeeding

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event, or by a scene or event temporally proximate to the questioning scene. For example, some burglars trigger an alarm. This raises the question of whether the authorities will hear it. Next, there is a scene of two policemen reading magazines in their squad car; they look up and switch on their siren, raising the question of whether they will arrive at the scene of the crime on time, and so on. Such localized networks of questions and answers are "micro" in nature. They connect two individual scenes or a limited series of scenes and sequences. But movies are also generally animated by macro-questions, ones for which we await answers throughout most of the film, and which may be thought of as organizing the bulk of significant action in the movie—indeed, the micro-questions are generally hierarchically subordinate to the macro-questions. For an example of a macro-question, consider *Wargames;* at a certain point most of the action is devoted to answering the question of whether nuclear destruction can be averted. Of course, movies often have more than one macro-question. *Into the Night* asks both whether the romantic leads can escape the Middle Eastern villains *and* whether this couple will become lovers. Both macro-questions are answered by means of roughly the same sequences of action, and the micro-questions and answers that structure those sequences tend, finally, to dovetail with the answers to these presiding macro-questions. What is called "closure" in movies can be explained as that moment when all the saliently posed and sustained questions that the movie has raised have been answered.

A successful erotetic narrative tells you, literally, everything you want to know about the action being depicted, i.e., it answers every question, or virtually every question, that it has chosen to pose saliently. (I say "virtually" in order to accommodate endings such as that in the original *Invasion of the Body Snatchers,* where the audience is left with one last pregnant question.) But even countenancing these cases, an erotetic movie narrative has an extraordinary degree of neatness and intellectually appealing compactness. It answers all the questions that it assertively presents to the audience, and the largest portion of its actions is organized by a small number of macro-questions, with little remainder. The flow of action approaches an ideal of uncluttered clarity. This clarity contrasts vividly with the quality of the fragments of actions and events we typically observe in everyday life. Unlike those in real life, the actions observed

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in movies have a level of intelligibility, due to the role they play in the erotetic narrative's system of questions and answers. Because of the question/answer structure, the audience is left with the impression that it has learned everything important to know concerning the action depicted. How is this achieved? By assertively introducing a selected set of pressing questions and then answering them—by controlling expectation by the manner in which questions are posed. This imbues the film with an aura of clarity while also affording an intense satisfaction concerning our cognitive expectations and our propensity for intelligibility.

The clarity imparted by the erotetic narrative in movies is, of course, reinforced by other clarity-producing methods, such as directing audience attention through the single shot or variable framing. These devices are the filmmaker's means of visual narration. They enable him to raise questions *visually:* the question "Will Jones be shot?" can be "asked" by focusing on a close-up of a gun. At the same time, the visual depiction of an action can either sustain or answer a question. "Will Eli Wallach die by hanging?" can be sustained by showing him teetering on a chair with a noose around his neck, or answered by showing us Clint Eastwood severing the rope in an act of super-human markmanship. Of course, many of the pressing questions that drive movies forward are not primarily set forth visually but are stated explicitly in the dialogue, or are already implied in the scripting of the action. Nevertheless, the devices of visual narration, if not the original source of the questions, help make those questions salient.

The visual devices of movies were earlier described in terms of the type of clarity they afforded the audience, of how they enable the audience to see all that it is relevant for them to see at the appropriate distance and in the appropriate sequence. At the same time, another sort of clarity has been attributed to the erotetic narrative as a primary ground of the power of movies. How do these two "clarities" relate to each other? Well, generally in movies, devices such as scaling, bracketing, and indexing will be employed so that the first item or the first gestalt of items that the audience is led to attend to in a given shot is the item or gestalt that is most relevant to the progress of the narrative—to the posing, sustaining, or answering of those questions the movie elects to answer. The importance of variable framing for movies is the potential it affords for assuring that

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the audience attends to everything that is *relevant,* and that it does so automatically, so to speak. "Relevance" is here determined by the narrative, or, more specifically the questions and answers that drive the narrative, which in turn are saliently posed and answered in important ways by means of variable framing.

In order for this account to be adequate, certain qualifications need to be acknowledged. While generally processes such as variable framing are coordinated with the narrative for the purpose of emphasizing the first item, or gestalt of items, seen by the audience, there are standard deviations to this principle. These deviations are often employed in thrillers for shock effect: the important subject, say, the killer, is hidden in the shot in such a way that the audience only comes to see him belatedly (but unavoidably). In terms of our account, these deviations are not destructive counterexamples, because they still illustrate how the flow of narration is kept under strict control and the audience in rapt attention.

Standard movies also often contain much material that is digressive from the point of view of the erotetic narrative, for example, a melodic interlude from the heroine by the campfire in a Western. While this paper cannot fully develop a theory of such digressions, it will suggest that the most important digressions typically found in movies are a function of the sub-genres the movies in question belong to (one could go on to explain those digressions by analyzing the sub-genres they most frequently appear in and, perhaps, proceed to analyze the power of those sub-genres).

We began by addressing the issue of the power of movies, which was understood as a question concerning the ways in which movies have engaged the widespread, intense response of untutored audiences throughout the century. We have dealt with the issue of the widespread response to movies by pointing to those features of movies that make them particularly accessible. We have also dealt with our intense engagement with movies in terms of the impression of coherence they impart, i.e., their easily grasped, indeed, their almost unavoidable, clarity. The accessibility of movies is at least attributable to their use of pictorial representation, variable framing, and narrative, the latter being the most pervasive form of explaining human actions. Their clarity is at least a function of variable framing in coordination with the erotetic narrative, especially where erotetic

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narration and variable framing are coordinated by the principle that the first item or gestalt of items the audience apprehends be that which, out of alternative framings, is most important to the narration. In short, this thesis holds that the power of movies—their capacity to evoke unrivaled widespread and intense response—is, first and foremost, at least a result of their deployment of pictorial representation, variable framing, and the erotetic narrative.

It will undoubtedly be noted that in this attempt to account for the power of movies, we have restricted our purview to features in movies which address the *cognitive* faculties of the audience. This is absolutely central to the argument. For only by focusing on cognitive capacities, especially ones as deeply embedded as pictorial representation, practical reason, and the drive to get answers to our questions, will we be in the best position to find the features of movies that account for their phenomenally *widespread* effectiveness; since cognitive capacities, at the level discussed, seem the most plausible candidate for what mass-movie audiences have *in common*. That is, the question of the power of movies involves explaining how peoples of different cultures, societies, nations, races, creed, educational backgrounds, age groups, and sexes can find movies easily accessible and gripping. Thus, the power of movies must be connected to some fairly generic features of human organisms to account for their power *across* class, cultural, and educational boundaries. The structures of perception and cognition are primary examples of fairly generic features of humans. Consequently, it seems that if we can suggest the ways in which movies are designed to engage and excite cognitive and perceptual structures, we will have our best initial approximation of their *generic* power.

Some qualifications, of course, are in order. First, we are not claiming that people do not respond intensely to forms other than movies; indeed, some people respond more intensely to other art forms than they do to movies. There are opera buffs and balletomanes, after all. But this is compatible with the claim we are examining, that there is something special about the widespread and intense, though not necessarily universal, response that movies have been observed to command.

Next, we are not denying that there may be levers beyond those we have discussed that also figure in the account of the power of movies. Marketing structures, including advertising, are important elements,

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as well as factors such as the transportability and reproducability of movies. Research in these areas should not be abandoned. However, considerations along these lines do not obviate the present sort of speculation, since there must still be something about the product, so marketed, that sustains interest.

Pictorial representations, variable framing, erotetic narration, and the interrelation of these elements in the ways proposed will, at the very least, be constituents of any account of the power of movies. This paper does not pretend to have offered a *complete* account of why movies are powerful—its modesty is signaled by the hedge "at the very least." Perhaps movies employ other clarifying features, such as music, that require analysis. Furthermore, apart from the question of why movies are powerful, we may wish to pursue different, but related, questions about why certain movies or groups of movies are powerful for certain groups of people; how do movies, or at least certain varieties of movies, engage particular classes, nations, genders, and so on. Theoretical interest in these questions would undoubtedly lead to a focus on elements of structure and content that have not been addressed here, since we have been concerned with the *generic* power of movies, not the power of movies for specific times, locales, sexes, and interest groups. However, nothing we have said suggests an objection in principle to these more specific questions, which questions, of course, will, in all probability, lead to speculation about aspects of audiences over and above their cognitive faculties. Social conditioning and affective psychology, *appropriately historicized,* must be introduced to explain the power of given movies for target groups. Sociology, anthropology, and certain forms of psychoanalysis are likely to be useful in such investigations. We can therefore continue to examine the power of movies by asking about the power of certain movies for historically specific audiences. However, if we wish to explain the power of movies for the world community, then pictorial representation, variable framing, and the erotetic narrative will be key elements in our account because of the ways in which they address common cognitive and perceptual capacities.

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ENDNOTES

The preparation of this paper has benefited from extensive discussions with David Bordwell, as well as from helpful comments by Annette Michelson and Ian Jarvie.

[1]See André Bazin, *What is Cinema?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), especially vol. I.

[2]For an example of an author who employs these approaches, see John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema, TV, Video* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982).

[3]For detailed criticism of the Bazinian approach see my "Concerning Photographic and Cinematic Representation," forthcoming in the journal *Dialectics and Humanism*. For extensive criticism of contemporary attributions of realistic psychological effects to viewers, see my "Address to the Heathen," *October*, #23, 1982, and my "A Reply to Heath," *October*, #27, 1983.

[4]The question of film's ideological operation is also a good one, one I shall take up in another essay currently in preparation.

[5]This essay is in Christian Metz's *The Imaginary Signifier* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1982). I criticize Metz's approach in a review of this book in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Winter 1984.

[6]J.E. Hochberg and V. Brooks, "Pictorial Recognition as an Unlearned Ability," *American Journal of Psychology*, #75, 1962, pp. 624-628.

[7]Ichitaro Hondo, "History of Japanese Painting," in *Painting 14-19th Centuries: Pageant of Japanese Art* (Tokyo: Tokyo National Museum, 1957), vol. II, pp. 54-55.

[8]J.B. Deregowski, E.S. Muldrow, and W.F. Muldrow, "Pictorial Recognition in a Remote Ethopian Population," *Perception*, #1, 1972, pp. 417-425.

[9]John M. Kennedy, *A Psychology of Picture Perception* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass; 1974), p. 79.

[10]K.J. Hayes and C. Hayes, "Picture Perception in a Home-Raised Chimpanzee," *Journal of Comparative and Physiological Psychology*, #46, 1953, pp. 470-474.

[11]John Searle, *Minds, Brains and Science* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 51-52.

[12]Noel Carroll, "Toward a Theory of Film Suspense," in *Persistence of Vision: The Journal of the Film Faculty of the City University of New York*, #1, 1984.

[13]V.I. Pudovkin, *Film Technique and Film Acting* (New York: Grove Press, 1960).

[14]Carroll, "Toward a Theory of Film Suspense," op. cit.

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Brian Winston

A Whole Technology of Dyeing: A Note on Ideology and the Apparatus of the Chromatic Moving Image

THE AESTHETIC HAS LOST its innocence. Today in critical discourse it is seen, often as not, as nothing but a willing tool of "the ideology of the dominant class":

> The aesthetic is for a number of reasons a peculiarly effective ideological medium: it is graphic, immediate and economical, working at instinctual and emotional depths yet playing too on the very surfaces of perception, entwining itself with the stuff of spontaneous experience and the roots of language and gesture. Precisely on this account, it is able to naturalise itself, to proffer itself as ideologically innocent.[1]

As Roland Barthes has pointed out: "Bourgeois ideology is of the scientific or intuitive kind, it records facts or perceives values, but refuses explanations; the order of the world can be seen as sufficient or ineffable but it is never seen as significant."[2] What follows is by way of a case study, taken from the realm of the moving image, illustrative of the ways in which ideologically complicit cultural production takes place.

No means of representation is as "innocent," as "scientific," as the photograph. Yet "every time we look at a photograph, we are aware, however slightly, of the photographer selecting that sight from an infinity of other sights."[3] Moreover, there are factors that go beyond the predelictions of the person handling the photographic apparatus, to the ideologically charged nature of the apparatus itself. Photographs, cinema, and television do not merely express in texts the

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ideology of the culture that produces them, with the possibility that other ideologies could equally easily be signified in different texts; rather, the technologies are themselves an ideological expression of the culture. It is one such expression—color film that more readily photographs Caucasians than other human types—that is our concern in this piece.

At the end of the documentary *El Pueblo Vencera,*[4] in a mirror image of the opening scene of the film, a young Salvadoran gun-toting guerilla in full fatigues encounters an elderly peasant woman, covered basket on head, in a clearing. The woman places her burden on the ground, pulls back the cover and reveals an Arriflex BL 16mm professional film camera for which the guerilla triumphantly exchanges his gun. If the pen was once deemed mightier than the sword, then today the camera can no doubt be thought mightier than the machine gun. But for this proposition to hold up, a preconditional further point must be admitted, viz, that the camera, a product of West German high technology costing some $15,000, is a device that serves, despite its provenance, any communications purpose. Implicit is the idea that, in the context of the politics of El Salvador or in any other situation, the camera is in some sense neutral—just as the gun is neutral.

That the cinema is a child of science and exhibits the supposed objectivity and accuracy of its parent is well known. Cinematography, like photography (and like the camera obscura), was initially introduced to the public as a tool of science, and those who worked the new apparatus in each case were *non tanquam pictor, sed tanquam mathematicus.*[5] It is worth noting that these supposed objective qualities are seductive enough to convince many—even Diego de la Texera, director of *El Pueblo Vencera,* who in different circumstances would be more on the *qui vive* as to the ideological forces with which they are dealing. It is as if de la Texera and other radical film and video makers have not understood the ideologically imposed limitations of the apparatus.

The apparatus of film and television is indeed so limited. It is, as A.D. Coleman points out, a product of "the lens culture" finally inaugurated by Cardano, Maurolycus, and Digges in the early 1550s,[6] and the replication of Northern European "distant point construction" perspective is its primary design objective.[7] The pho-

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tographic image accommodates the previously established codes of representation just as the social circumstances in which these new images are consumed conform to preexisting and culturally specific patterns. The apparatus is not neutral, and altering its purpose requires considerable deformation of its inherent (i.e., designed-in) capacities and capabilities.

Understanding of the ideological implications of the institution of the cinema, including its apparatus, began in earnest in the aftermath of the *evenments* of 1968 and has been conducted in the pages of the French film journals with recent useful contributions from American and British film historians and theoreticians on specific issues. The agenda of this debate has broadened from (comparatively) simple considerations of the ideological intentions or implications of this or that film text, to include psychologically inflected discussions of the unavoidable ideological effects of viewing films and, to a lesser degree, television,[8] as well as accounts and explanations of the development and implications of the entire technical apparatus and economic structure of the film and television industries.[9] The discussion that follows is part of this latter project.

II

> We so often forget, for example, that when a color film is seen projected, the color is not in the Bazanian sense a direct . . . registration of color in the natural world . . . there is, in fact, no direct . . . link between the color of the natural world and the color of the projected color film—*a whole technology of dyeing has intervened.*[10](italics added)

The makers of *El Pueblo Vincera,* a color film, must have been aware of the limitations placed upon them by the use of color when filming black people. All professionals fully understand that such films, despite continuous improvements in performance, do not render black skin tones as easily as they do white; and that, when filming blacks, it is often necessary to augment lighting, by bouncing reflected light back into the face from a low angle, for instance, so as not to lose details. Were these stocks to offer "a direct . . . registration of color in the natural world," we could simply attribute the difficulties of representing blacks on film to a natural racial disadvantage—somewhat like sickle-cell anaemia. But color film does *not* directly register the world; "a whole technology of dyeing intervenes."

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As the comedian Godfrey Cambridge once hyperbolized—but only slightly—blacks look green on American (NTSC; National Television Standards Committee) television, no knob-twiddling changes their color (unless one makes the white people orange), and he for one was not surprised. It is the history and ideological implications of this technology, a white technology that best reproduces Caucasian skin tones, that I wish to explore.

At one level it is "inevitable" that the bias of color film should be the way it is. After all, according to Kodak, more than eight billion color negative exposures were made in the U.S. alone in 1982, and the vast majority of them were by and of whites.[11] But the rhetoric surrounding color film, as much in the technical and scholarly literature as in advertising and other popular accounts, implicitly denies any such partiality in favor of a stress on naturalness, realism, and verisimilitude—mathematics, as it were, rather than painting. Even aware scholars slip easily into this language. Edward Branigan, for instance, in an otherwise most illuminating account of how film historians have represented the development of color cinematography, describes both additive and subtractive photographic methods as "natural color processes":

> It is enough to note, without exploring details, that *natural* color processes are usually divided into two types—additive color systems (e.g., Kinemacolor, early Technicolor, and modern television) and subtractive color systems (e.g., Technicolor, Eastman Color, and Kodachrome). . . . We have considered the invention of color with respect to the photograph (*natural* color), but a second line of development lies closer to painting. Hand-painted daguerreotypes appeared around 1839 and hand-painted films appeared with the very first films in 1894. . . .[12](italics added)

A survey of color processes written for a professional journal by an official of Eastman Kodak highlights the supposed naturalness of the company's subtractive systems in the language of impeccable scientific description:

> All of the [additive] systems discussed . . . have resulted in a final picture being put on the screen in color by superimposing or adding the lights of two or three primary colors. In nature, however, colors of objects are viewed by subtraction; they absorb or subtract certain component parts of the visible spectrum of white light and reflect the remainder, which the eye sees as color.[13]

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(This analogy between human vision and the way Eastman Kodak's color films "view" nature is obviously anthropomorphic and tendentious.)

Thus, the cultural specificity of color film is systematically denied, and instead it is suggested that the stocks, true to their scientific heritage, reflect and re-present the natural world. This places the development of color squarely within that received view, theoretically legitimated by André Bazin, which holds that the entire technological development of cinema progressively seeks to possess the world iconically. And as Natalie Kalmus, wife of the "inventor" of Technicolor, Herbert Kalmus, expressed it half a century ago when addressing a meeting of technicians that was held under the rubric "Color Consciousness":

> From a technical standpoint, motion pictures have been steadily tending toward more complete realism. In the early days, pictures were a mere mechanical process of imprinting light upon film and projecting that result upon a screen. Then came the perfection of detail—more accurate sets and costumes—more perfect photography. The advent of sound brought increased realism through the auditory senses. The last step, color, with the addition of the chromatic sensations, completed the process. Now motion pictures are able to duplicate faithfully all the auditory and visual sensations. This enhanced realism enables us to portray life and nature as it really is, and in this respect we have made definite strides forward.[14]

Within this claim of general faithful duplication, "flesh" always comes to mean Caucasian skin tones.[15] Only in the mid-fifties does a degree of what might be called sophistication begin to creep into the professional discourse: "Flesh-color, even of the so-called 'white' races, varies from light pink or almost white to various shades of tan and brown according to the type of skin and the amount of sunburn. . . ."[16] However, elsewhere in the standard work just quoted, "flesh" ranks between "yellow" or "sand" or proximate to "peach" and "white."[17] The cultural assumptions of those concerned with the development and applications of color film are those of the society at large. Natalie Kalmus, for instance, had these unsurprising things to say about "black" and "white":

> Black is no color, but the absorption of all color. It has a distinctly negative and destructive aspect. Black instinctively recalls night, fear, darkness, crime. It suggests funerals, mourning. It is impenetrable, comfortless,

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secretive. It flies at the masthead of the pirate's ship. Our language is replete with references to this frightful power of black—black art, black despair, blackguard, blackmail, black hand, the black hole of Calcutta, black death (the devastating plague of medieval Europe), black list, black-hearted, etc. . . . . White represents purity, cleanliness, peace and marriage. Its introduction into a color sublimates that color. For example, the red of love becomes more refined and idealistic as white transforms the red to pink. White uplifts and ennobles, while black lowers and renders more base and evil any color.[18]

It is no sin that Kalmus and her peers were less sophisticated than, say, Wittgenstein (or Eisenstein) about color. The sin is that they claimed, both in practice and theory, to be doing what came naturally, rather than recognizing the cultural influences that led them, through complex optics and chemistry, to a most highly mediated analogue of the natural world of color.

III

There are two methods currently available for capturing color iconically on a photographic plate. In one—microdispersion, developed by F.W. Lanchester in 1895—a coarse grating, with some three hundred slits to the inch, is interposed within the body of the camera between the taking lens and the film. The grating breaks up the light, which is then collected by a second field lens and passed through a narrow angled prism. Lenses on either side of the prism, the third and fourth needed for the system, focus the image of the slits (turned by the prism into spectra) onto the photographic plate. By these means, the image is broken down into its constituent color elements—dominant wavelength, chroma, luminance, and value—that are then recorded on the plate. After development, the plate can be viewed by reversing the light path through the system so that the taking lens becomes a projection lens, and all of the original chromaticities and intensities are recreated.[19]

A second direct method was developed in 1891 by Gabriel Lippmann, professor of physics at the Sorbonne from 1878 and a Nobel laureate in 1908. It was a Lippmann "photochrome" made in the summer of 1893 by the Lumière brothers that ranks as the first color portrait. Unlike the microdispersion method, the Lippmann system does not require a special camera, only a modified plate

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holder. It depends on an emulsion of extremely fine grain, in which the individual photosensitive granules are physically shorter than the color wavelengths that are to be recorded. The plate is placed in the camera with the emulsion side away from the lens. After exposing the plate, Lippmann poured a film of pure mercury against the emulsion, thus mirroring it. The light-waves of the image are reflected in the mercury back against the incoming waves and the interference pattern thereby caused is recorded on the plate. This pattern of stationary waves in the emulsion can then be developed and contains all the information of the chromaticities and intensities of the original colors. The image can be reproduced by using reflected light passed through the plate.[20]

"Photochromes" are obsolete and have never enjoyed any degree of popularity. The fine grain required to record accurately all the color data needs emulsions that are so slow as apparently to require several minutes of exposure even in sunlight, and the images can be viewed only by carefully positioning the eye at a precise angle—otherwise no color can be seen at all. Similar difficulties attach to the microdispersion method. The special camera is bulky, and the additional optics as well as the fine grain necessitate strong illumination and long exposures. However real or otherwise these disadvantages,[21] the direct systems do seem to require considerable light and certainly yield no prints.

There was not enough demand for the "scientific" direct color image to overcome these difficulties and ensure a diffusion of the techniques. For all that "photochromes" record photographically the physical parameters of the original spectral phenomena, the human eye/brain mechanism does not require such a degree of fidelity since it normally simplifies the color information it processes. Artificial renditions of color, it turns out, need not represent reality as faithfully as direct methods do. Filters and dyes are psychologically effective, although the abandoned iconic processes remain the standard against which the limitations of the more-than-a-hundred filter- and dye-based systems must be measured.

It was known from 1722 that when three mezzotinted copper plates, one blue, one red, and one yellow, are superimposed, they produce a full-color plate. The laborious handwork on the stone this system required was superceded by lithography, another three-color process introduced commercially in 1812. In 1861, the great English

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physicist Clerk Maxwell, while discoursing on the nature of human color perception, offered a suggestion as to how it might be demonstrated:

> Let it be required to ascertain the colors of a landscape by means of impressions taken on a preparation equally sensitive to rays of every color. Let a plate of red glass be placed before the camera, and an impression taken. The positive of this will be transparent wherever the red light has been abundant in the landscape, and opaque where it has been wanting. Let it now be put in a magic lantern with the red glass, and a red picture will be thrown on the screen. Let this operation be repeated with a green and a violet glass, and by means of three magic lanterns let the three images be superimposed on the screen. The color on any point on the screen will depend on that of the corresponding point of the landscape, and by properly adjusting the intensities of the lights, etc., a complete copy of the landscape, as far as visible color is concerned, will be thrown on the screen.[22]

Maxwell's three-color hypothesis is the basis for all current color reproductive methods, photographic and electronic, and at first it might seem as if it agrees with the physiology of the human eye.[23] As far as can be determined, the cones of the retina, those photoreceptors sensitive to color, are of three types: the ρ (responsive to red-orange-yellow), the γ (responsive to orange-yellow-green-blue/green), and the β (responsive to blue/green-blue-violet). If Maxwell's filters, or any dyes used in a photographic process, only triggered one of these cone-types as appropriate, then the pattern of stimulation caused by viewing the reproduction would agree exactly with the original stimulus—as occurs in Professor Lippmann's images, for instance. Unfortunately, no filter can be found that will activate only the γ-cones. Wherever green appears, there will be an excess of β and ρ-cone stimulus that will render greens paler and, although scarcely noticeable in the reds and blues, will also cause whites to acquire a magenta tinge. Increasing the intensity of the red and blue lights or dyes restores the white but at the cost of distortion in the relative chromaticities and intensities—which, as it happens, is psychologically (or, perhaps better, ideologically) less offensive than off-white. And here is opened a whole can of colored worms, especially close (chromatically speaking) to Caucasian skin tones.

This is not the place in which to outline the range of choices facing those chemists and physicists whose job it is to produce color-sensitive photographic and electronic materials. Suffice it only to

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point out that with trichromatic systems (contemporary color systems, that is) the opportunities for choice and the need for decisions are boundless; this is why one color film or color television system is easily distinguished from another, and none, it can fairly be claimed, is perfectly iconic.

IV

From the beginning, motion picture films were hand-colored and were very often, if not most of the time, printed on tinted stocks. With the introduction of sound, tinting at the developing stage was abandoned because the process interfered with the optical sound track. Kodak responded by introducing a range of seventeen tinted Sonochrome positive stocks that did not affect the audio track.

Kinemacolor, the earliest movie system to exploit the Maxwell additive approach, was in commercial operation by 1909. It was a two-color sequential process in which camera (and projector) alternately exposed frames through revolving filter disks, at an increased rate of 32 per second. The disks contained two filters, one cyan/blue, the other red/orange.[24] The Dowager Empress of Russia, after watching at Buckingham Palace the Kinemacolor film of George V's Delhi Durbar, pronounced that it "gives one the impression of having seen it all in reality."[25]

Other subsequent additive systems rang the changes on the basic method of superimposing discretely tinted images. These included squeezing the images onto one 35mm frame or, in a significant development, splitting the image so that it fell through a green or red filter onto two separate film strips. Apart from registration difficulties, the comparative darkness of the blue filter translated into a brightness flicker in the sequential variants of this approach, and there was always a tendency, whatever system was used, towards color fringing—i.e., chromaticities did not agree exactly with the outlines of objects, but bled. Eventually, these additive processes would encompass three color filters rather than two, as many as four filtered images per frame, and, always, extremely complex cameras and projectors. Yet although the last variant was proposed as late as 1950, additive color reproduction never took hold in the cinema. Kalmus, of Technicolor, in describing what drove him from additive to subtractive processes, graphically illustrates why:

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During one terrible night in Buffalo, I decided that such special attachments on the projector required an operator who was a cross between a college professor and an acrobat, a phrase which I have since heard repeated many times. Technicolor then and there abandoned additive processes and special attachments on the projector.[24]

In 1922, after six years of effort, Kalmus thus quit the search for additive solutions.

Subtractive systems, the principles of which had been outlined by du Hauron and, independently, by Cros in 1869, could in theory produce a colored film that would simply be threaded through a standard projector. Subtractive processes also rely on a series of separate trichromatically filtered black-and-white images, but instead of remaining discrete, each image is dyed and then superimposed—as in lithography—upon the others to create the full-color picture.

The major problem lay in the difficulty of dyeing the negatives. "Imbibing"—or relief image—was the earliest system, patented in 1874, for achieving this.[27] The gelatin of a negative swells up in proportion to the intensity of the exposure (or becomes thinner where more exposed), allowing a developing procedure in which a colored dye solution adheres to those parts thus distinguished. The exposed gelatin imbibes the liquid dye. Sequential imbibings create a full trichromatic subtractive image on the one gelatine base. This dye-image is easily copied so that many prints can be run off.

The Technicolor subtractive process used two films (one sensitive to the red-yellow range, another to the green-blue) cemented back to back. In a 1928 refinement, Kalmus managed to get them on the same celluloid base—a "bipack"—using the imbibing method. By 1932, the Technicolor process involved not just stock and developing techniques, but also a special beam-splitter camera, of the sort first introduced to aid an additive process in 1918, which exposed a blue/red bipack film and, simultaneously, a separate green negative. This produced a three-color master.

The system, in all its various forms, privileged the laboratory, because that was where the color image—for all that it was indexically (i.e., photographically) bound to represent colors in the real world—was, in effect, created. Although neither the special camera nor the superiority of Technicolor's imbibing technique were of Kalmus's devising, they enabled him to demand and obtain considerable control over the films shot with this process. He had perfected

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the most effective exploitation of known methods, and exceptional craft in the laboratory, as much as any other factor, was the basis of Technicolor's hegemony over cinema color. The close control exercised by Kalmus's "color consultants"—often over the resistance of studio technicians who were under no illusions about Technicolor's "naturalness"—limited the circumstances in which the film was exposed. The result was that the stock established its own reference system consistent, not with nature, but only with itself, as in one of Tolkien's fairy-tale worlds.

By the late forties, Technicolor's hegemony also entailed a range of patent and antitrust problems,[28] but since 1953 the camera and the special negative stocks had been abandoned. Technicolor is now essentially only a multinational chain of laboratories that bring their special skills to Eastman Kodak materials

The original Kodachrome process was introduced in 1913 and in 1916 was adapted for movies by use of a beam-splitter camera. In 1928, under license from its French developers, Kodak began to manufacture a film it named Kodacolor—a lenticular 16mm stock. Twenty years before, Gabriel Lippmann had envisioned a film stock that had, in effect, a myriad of tiny lenses embedded in the emulsion—a monochrome extension, in some sense, of his previous direct system—that would allow for normal viewing. The following year, 1909, Rudolph Berthon thought to place a three-color filter before such a film, and in 1923 a successful demonstration of a color lenticular process was given in Paris. The method produced prints of great delicacy, but attempts by Kodak, Paramount, and the French to make a 35mm lenticular stock were fruitless; anyway, by that time, the mid-thirties, Kodak was ready with a new Kodachrome.[29]

The chemistry enabling subtraction to take place on a single negative was understood in the same year Berthon began developing the lenticular stock. Rudolf Fischer and his assistant Johann Siegrist noticed that paraphenylendiamine, a photographic developer, produced oxidations as it worked on the silver halides of the film. It "coupled" with the emulsion to form a color, in effect making an insoluble dye.[30] Fischer patented the idea of "color-formers" or "dye-couplers" in 1912 and publicized a growing list of compound substances in a series of patents and reports in the British, French, German, and American technical press before the First World War.[31] Other workers in the early twenties added to the number of known

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couplers, but it was two young American amateur chemists (and professional musicians) who were to create the first practical application of Fischer's breakthrough.

In 1924, Leopold Mannes and Leopold Godowsky, Jr., patented a reversal film stock where two emulsions were placed on a single base, the lower one faster and sensitized to red, the upper one slower and sensitized to green-blue/green.[32] Clearly, the combination of dye-couplers and multilayer variable speed emulsion had the potential of producing, on one base, an integral full-color image with the trichromatic filters and all the necessary dyes "built in," as it were. By 1930, Mannes and Godowsky, working privately, still remained a step ahead of the industrial laboratories. At this point, Kodak had the good sense to hire them, and they moved out of various hotel rooms and the bathrooms of their parents' New York apartments to Rochester. By 1933, they had perfected a bipack reversal system for 16mm use; then on April 15th, 1935, Kodak offered a new Kodachrome amateur movie stock, the "tripac" implied by Cros's vision nearly seventy years earlier.

For the first time, an easy-to-use color stock was available that required no special apparatus. A year later, a 35mm version for reversal transparencies was introduced. Kodak designed the films so that the couplers were added, not to the emulsion, but during the development process. This created a situation as privileged as the one into which Kalmus had steered Technicolor; anybody could *expose* Kodachrome, but only Kodak could *develop* it. It is not entirely inappropriate that Kodachrome's "inventors" were known in the Kodak Research Laboratory as "God and Man." They had not only broken through into a new world of color, but in so doing they had created a virtual processing monopoly. The German company Agfa, close on Kodak's heels, produced a comparable stock at the same time with the couplers *built into* the film so that it could be developed anywhere.

Because these solutions all produced approximations and involved trade-offs in color responsiveness, grain, and overall sensitivity, that was not the end of the matter. The tripack subtractive film has undergone immense development since Mannes and Godowski's day. Agfa introduced a color-negative system just before the Second World War. Kodak marketed Ektachrome, a tripack with built-in couplers that could be developed at home. Edwin Land adapted his

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instant monochrome system to Polacolor in 1962. In general, all these film stocks gained steadily over the years in both sensitivity (with no concomitant increase in grain) and overall responsiveness.

After the war, the differences between Agfacolor and the American color films assumed an overt ideological significance when the Russians adopted, or rather captured, the former. Agfacolor became a "socialist" stock: it had paler colors, muted edges, and increased sensitivity to pastels. This was in contrast to Technicolor, which was "purer than reality, needing strong artificial light, aggressive, almost whorish." These are the terms, Dudley Andrew suggests, in which the French perceived the ideological differences in this color "cold war" of the late forties.[33] After the Second World War, the French, lacking a domestic subtractive system, were faced with choosing between domestic-additive (and therefore obsolete) methods, including a revived lenticular stock, or importing foreign technology. The domestic systems failed, and the French chose Agfacolor—but disguised in a politically acceptable form because obtained from Agfa's pre-war Belgian partners, Gaevert. Technicolor lost out in France, not just because of French ambivalence ("a desire for, and a loathing of, American technology," in Andrew's phrase) but more important, because with only three laboratories—in Hollywood, New Jersey, and London—it simply could not handle any more business. By 1948, it demanded nine months lead-time on principle photography, and printing schedules were being planned three years in advance.

V

We have presented the history of the development of *filmstocks* as the locus of choice and decision, but the color image depends, as Technicolor's insistance on control of the filmic event reveals, on more than just the stock. As we have indicated, the image can be altered (within the parameters of the film) during processing, although with color these options are much reduced. There are other major factors involved. Technicolor's move onto the studio floor was motivated as much by the desire to maintain absolute control over lighting as to prohibit outsiders from loading the cameras. (This was done ostensibly to protect the patent, but since that was a matter of public record, other factors must also have been at work.) Control of lighting was crucial, and when coupled with the existing power of the

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laboratory, ensured the consistency of Technicolor's performance, especially as sets, costume, and makeup could also be bent to highlight the process' most responsive aspects.

Natural and manmade "white" unfiltered lights are actually colored. They range from, say, the blue of a northern sky, through sunlight, to projection bulbs, and the comparative red of ordinary incandescent household lamps. (As conventionally measured in degrees Kelvin, these examples run from 7500 for the northern sky to 2800 for the household lamp.) With monochrome film, the color of the illumination is significant, but not critical. With color film, of course, it assumes a far greater moment.

After the First World War, film lighting had settled its own artificial code, mixing, in the interests of maintaining a largely realist convention, a number of theatrical systems: basic flat lighting, lighting for effects, and spotlighting. Peter Baxter persuasively argues that as electricity was introduced into the studios in the years before the war, there was a desire to emulate the most advanced stage techniques: "the cinema was moving in the same direction as commercial American theatre, and a few paces behind it."[34] The combination of techniques resulted in the "three-point" (i.e., keylight, fill-light, and backlight) overhead system—with almost no floor-level sources except for special effects—that is still in use today. For Baxter, this application of the electric light expresses the dominant ideological assumptions of the studios in creating a style that operates by "revelation and expression."[35]

Monochrome stocks became ever more sensitive until, in the late thirties, general lighting levels could be reduced by 70 percent. The studios were now so dim, comparatively speaking, that cinematographers began to use photoelectric light meters to ensure proper exposure, something the mysterium of the craft did not previously allow.[36] A sequence of responses, ostensibly occasioned by changes in the technology (sound as well as color), can be traced in lighting, set and costume design, and makeup. These changes are more complex than a simple technological progression suggests, since they actually reflect the forces at work within the organization of the industry, the social positioning of Hollywood, as well as the underlying thrust towards an ever-more-transparent mode of representation.

As a prophylactic against widespread filmmaking in the society, the combined effect of all these complications could not be bettered.

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Movie production became, like newspaper production a hundred years earlier, more and more capital-intensive and less and less accessible. This is the trajectory, a common one in media technology since it can be seen not only in newspaper history, that the cinema traces. Once established behind a "high-tech" bastion, cheaper monopack color systems were introduced without fear that the other elements of the process would be easily duplicated either by those seeking entry to the industry or even by rank outsiders. Similarly, the 16mm format was improved and professionalized for television use, that is, within a highly capital-intensive environment. The public was left for nearly forty years with 8mm, a film too grainy for large-scale exhibition. The ideological underpinnings of these technological developments are, comparatively speaking, clearer than the cinema's supposed drive towards "realism."

Color was more than unrealistic, in the sense of being a highly manufactured approximation of the real world, and it was, as Ed Buscombe points out,[37] not used in those sorts of movies that at first sight might have been thought to benefit most from additional "realism"—social dramas in the genres of war and crime films (insofar as these were "realistic") or newsreels and documentaries. (It should not be objected that the color stocks were too slow for non-fiction since much of it was shot outdoors. Color newsreels were certainly possible and could have appeared much earlier than they did.) Instead, the first trichromatic Technicolor film was Disney's Oscar-winning cartoon *Flowers and Trees*. Douglas Fairbanks, star of the bichromatic Technicolor feature *The Pirate*, complained that color could distract the eye, confuse the action, and, presumably worst of all, "take attention from acting and facial expression."[38] It was also more expensive, a further significant factor during the Depression. Buscombe argues that color came to denote luxury, spectacle, or fantasy, and a celebration of its own technological mastery. Thus, Kansas is black and white; Oz is technicolored. So much did color come to signify a lack of serious intent that a Pathe producer was able to announce in 1947: "The French don't go in for musicals or color."[39]

A confusion therefore exists about the signification of color in the Hollywood film, a confusion that simultaneously deems color real and fantastic; there is also a certain cognitive dissonance in the professional discourse. Even Natalie Kalmus realized that despite

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motion pictures' faithful duplication of "all the auditory and visual sensations," there is a distinction between "natural colors and lights" and "man-made colors and artificial lights."[40] It is a distinction she and her fellow workers devoted their lives to ignoring.

VI

In all this it should not be forgotten that "perhaps the most important single factor in dramatic cinematography is the relation between the color sensitivity of an emulsion and the reproduction of pleasing flesh tones."[41] The failure to find a direct color system requires not only chemical manipulation; it allows manipulation to accommodate the cultural prejudices of the users—to make, by careful chemistry, already pleasing (Caucasian) flesh tones more pleasing than they are in nature. Determining which prejudices might be at work in the culture became an agenda item for the research laboratory:

> Series of color prints have been made from well-exposed color separation negatives of several typical scenes. The prints of each of these differ in tone reproduction, balance and in other ways subject to controlled variation. These series have been presented to numerous judges, and their judgments have been compared with results of measurements of various colors in the prints.

Central to this positivist social science enterprise undertaken by Kodak researchers in the early fifties was a series of prints of a portrait of "a young lady" which exhibited

> variations of balance from too red or yellow to too blue, and from too green to too pink. These prints were submitted to a number of judges who were asked to accept or reject each on the basis of color alone. . . .
>
> Optimum reproduction of skin color is not "exact" reproduction . . . "exact reproduction" is rejected almost unanimously as "beefy." On the other hand, when the print of highest acceptance is masked and compared with the original subject, it seems quite pale. . . .
>
> The discrepancy between "exact" reproduction and preferred reproduction is partly due to distortions inherent in the process, such that a certain discrepancy of a particular color is necessary to permit the best over-all reproduction of all colors in the picture.
>
> Similar results have been obtained with other colors. The directions and amounts of difference between exact reproduction and optimum reproduction are different for every color tested.[42]

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Kodak, faced with the physical inevitability of distortion, here establishes the potential superiority of its products to the real world. The subject of the photograph can be made to have skin tones *more* pleasing than she has in reality. Exact reproduction, a supposed goal of the photographic and cinematographic project, takes second place to inexact, culturally determined, "optimum" reproduction. Caucasian skin tones are not to be rendered as they are, but rather as they are preferred—a whiter shade of white. The results of such social investigations as well as the growing understanding of the physics of color, the physiology of perception, and the chemistry of dyes and films, can be translated into ever more culturally determined products.

All this is not to suggest some crude conspiracy on the part of the industrial chemists or physicists responsible for the color of the moving image. The above account draws attention to the existence of choices in the development of these processes and to suggest that in situations of choice, consciously or unconsciously, cultural determinants will operate—as much in the scientific environment as anywhere. The Kodak experiment cited above speaks eloquently to how research is redolent of a specific culture: its results do not produce a film stock that can be readily manipulated to give good black skin tones.

That this should warrant attention is only the result of the operations of media, technology, and, especially, media technology in the culture. These operations, in a sense hidden because transparent, conform perfectly to Barthes's explication of bourgeois ideology in general: that in such ideology, "the order of the world can be seen as sufficient or ineffable, it is never seen as significant."[43] Indeed, so insignificant is it, that Western color film can supposedly be used as a tool against itself, as if a whole technology of dyeing had not intervened.

ENDNOTES

This paper could not have been written without the guidance and advice of my colleague Janet Staeger.

[1]Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology* (London: Verso, 1978), p. 20.
[2]Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Paladin, 1973), p. 142.
[3]John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC, 1972), p. 10.

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[4]Produced by The El Salvador Film and Video Project, directed by Diego de la Texera, El Salvador/Cuba 1981 (distributed by Cineguild).

[5]Johannes Kepler, quoted in Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) p. 50.

[6]I wish to thank A.D. Coleman for letting me read and quote from his unpublished manuscript, "The Lens," p. 24, revised and published as "Lentil Soup," in *Etc.*, Spring 1985, p. 19.

[7]It is commonly asserted that Quattrocento Perspectiva Artificialis (a.k.a. "costruzione legittina") as theorized by Alberti is the ground upon which the camera obscura portabilis' lens sits, but as Conolli (see footnote 9) correctly points out, this dominance was not without exceptions. It seems rather that Albertian perspective is somewhat beside the point, and the apparatus, as refined by Kepler, replicates the effects of the major alternative Dutch system in that no Albertian "window" is suggested between the artist and/or viewer, and the unified vanishing point, although capable of being accommodated to this system, was not as privileged as it was in Italy. See Alpers, op.cit., pp. 53ff.

[8]See Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," trans. by Alan Williams in *Film Quarterly*, Winter, pp. 39–47.

[9]See Jean Louis Conolli, "Technique et ideologie," part 1, *Cashiers du Cinema* (Paris), May/June 1971, pp. 21.

[10]Peter Wollen, "Cinema And Technology: A Historical Overivew," in *The Cinematic Apparatus*, edited by Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), p. 24.

[11]Eastman Kodak Co. press release CPI 8357NR, Rochester, N.Y., Jan. 25, 1983, p. 1, quoted in Coleman, op.cit., p. 3.

[12]"Color and Cinema: Problems in the Writing of History," *Film Reader #4*, 1979 p. 22.

[13]Roderick T. Ryan, "Color in the Motion-Picture Industry," *Journal of the SMPTE*, July 1976, p. 499.

[14]Natalie Kalmus, "Colour Consciousness," *Journal of the SEMPE*, Aug. 1935, pp. 139ff. The meeting was held by the Technicians Branch of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Hollywood on May 21, 1935.

[15]See, for example, Joseph Valentine, "Make-Up and Set Painting Aid New Film," *American Cinematographer*, Feb. 1939, p. 54.

[16]R.W.G. Hunt, *The Reproduction of Colour* (London: John Wiley and Sons, 1967), p. 62.

[17]Ibid, pp. 127,157.

[18]Kalmus, op.cit., p. 144.

[19]Hunt, op.cit., p. 26.

[20]Josef Maria Eder, *Geschichte der Photographie*, 1932, translated as *History of Photography*, by Edward Epstean (New York: Dover, 1978), pp. 668ff.

[21]The caveat is because all modern accounts in the photographic literature which consistently speak to the excellence of the Lippmann method also stress its limitations, but are written with no indication that modern materials have been used to duplicate the original experiments. Therefore it is possible that the difficulties, originally highlighted by the inventors of other more diffused systems, have simply become part of the received history of photography and are more apparent than real.

[22]E.J. Wall, *The History of Three-Color Photography* (Boston: American Photographic Publishing Company, 1925), p. 4.

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[23]However, our knowledge is limited—which is attested to, for instance, by the illogical color constancy experiment, first demonstrated by Gaspard Monge in 1789.

[24]Ryan, op.cit., pp. 496ff.

[25]Jay Leyda, *Kino* (New York: Collier Books, 1968), p. 47 note (quoted in Branigan, op.cit., p. 27).

[26]Ryan, op.cit., p. 500. Additive processes persist in television. In the NTSC system, three electron guns, like Maxwell's three filtered cameras, scan the image by means of a system of mirrors. In the receiving cathode ray tube, clusters of red, blue, and green phosphor dots—a system suggested in Germany by Flechsig in 1938 but harking back to the Autochrome plate of the Lumière brothers marketed in 1907—are activated to reproduce the original.

[27]Wall, op.cit., p. 390.

[28]Branigan, op.cit., p. 24.

[29]In 1955, Eastman Kodak revived the 16mm lenticular film because it could be developed faster than conventional substractive stacks, and increasing the speed of development was suddenly of importance. Prime-time color programming was just starting and needed to be recorded for networking to the other coast. Kodak saw in lenticular color film an opportunity to stunt the development of videotape recording, at this point just emerging from the experimental stage. Between September 1956 and February 1958, the pioneering network in color, NBC, used Kodacolor film for making "hot" (i.e., fast) kinescopes; but in November of 1956 CBS transmitted the first videotaped program. Sixteen months later, NBC gave up and went to the videotape. There are no contemporary lenticular stocks.

[30]Wall, op.cit., p. 406.

[31]Ibid, p. 417.

[32]Ibid, p. 158.

[33]"Post War Struggle for Colour," in de Lauretis and Heath, eds., pp. 61ff.

[34]Peter Baxter, "On the History and Ideology of Film Lighting," *Screen*, Autumn 1975, p. 92.

[35]Ibid, p. 100.

[36]Valentine, loc.cit. Photoelectric cells had been in production since 1911, and various light meters had been available.

[37]Ed Buscambe, "Sound and Color," *Jumo Cut*, April 1978, p. 25.

[38]Ibid.

[39]Andrews, op.cit., p. 68.

[40]Kalmus, op.cit., p. 141.

[41]Valentine, loc.cit.

[42]David L. MacAdam, "Quality of Color Reproduction," *Journal of the SMPTE*, May 1951, pp. 501ff.

[43]Barthes, loc.cit.

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Farrukh Dhondy

Keeping Faith: Indian Film and its World

I FOUND OUT EARLY that Ezra Pound was wrong about one thing. There I was with my copy of Neruda and a Spanish-English dictionary, trying to prove his dictum that to learn a language you only need to know the best hundred poems in it. At an early age I reformulated his dictum; to know the best hundred poems in a language, you need to know the language. Since then I have found the exception to my rule: the language of popular Indian cinema. To understand it, you only need to understand one or two of the songs that it has succeeded in making its essential slogans.

To prove this amazing exception, one can go further. One verse from just one song (every film has to have eight to twenty songs to succeed in its myth-enforcing aims) can do the trick. I have chosen such an one. It's from *Jis Desh Me Ganga Behti Hai,* a classic of the late fifties from Raj Kapoor:

> Koochh log jo jada janthe hain
> Insaan ko kabh pehchhanthe hai
> Ye poorabh hai poorabhwalleh
> Har jaan ki keemath janthe hain
> Har jaan ki keemath janthe hain.

In rough translation, to continue the lesson, this means:

> Some people there are who know too much
> They can't recognise a human being as such
> We Easterners, in the East we know
> The value of a soul, be it high or low.

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The name of the film, no surprise, is *The Land In which The Ganges Flows*. It brought tears to millions of eyes. It stood for India in the fifties as certainly as the products of Cecil B. De Mille stood for the extravagance of America.

Like most films before it, and all popular Indian cinema that follows it, that particular epic tries, through its songs, its story, its stock of characters, and its system of values to contribute in the way that the moving image can to the discovery of India.

Film came to India at the turn of the century, a little behind industrialization, half a century behind capitalized production. It came to a colonized India and developed its nationalist instincts against the colonizers. It continued through a "free" India looking for a national personality that transcended the histories—separate and distinct—of regions, castes, religions. It found its mass audience in an India in which a settled way of life is giving way to a new settlement, in which a peasantry is being dragged into the influences of urbanization and the ways of the modern world.

To all this chaos the mythology of the Hindi film reacts. It asserts the mythical moralities of a settled, agrarian way of life; it champions the East and while aping it, attacks the West. What else can a poor nation do? Indian cinema is too old for anyone to claim to have grown up with it. Yet even the films I saw in the early fifties as a boy brought into the open a debate about Indian culture which in one form or other applies to every literature, every televisual culture, and even to contemporary Indian cinema. The questions are still asked. The Indian middle classes are still to an extent snobbish about Indian films (of course they watch Satyajit Ray with national pride, and Mrnal Sen, Ritvik Ghatak, Shyam Benegal with the sort of attention that the Western meritocrat would give to Godard). It is felt that the Bombay film has debased Indian classical culture, as discovered by the hundred years of nationalism that preceded it, and has not elevated Indian folk culture by searching for and representing its authentic soul. In that sense, the Indian (Bombay) feature film cannot act as the Flagship of Indian nationalism. The real India is not there.

And yet the Bombay film is India's central entertainment industry. Millions flock to the box offices. People die in the crush of the queues when the films of particular stars are first screened. Movie theaters hire football fields in which to sell tickets for the premiers. The

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persona of the film star keeps idolatory alive, for Hindus, Muslims, Shikhs, Christians, and Parsees alike. Professional political thinkers brand the whole industry and its output "escapist." The description is born of a kind of frustration: here is a forum of mass entertainment; why can't it be turned to propaganda?

In the 1960s, when a young movement of Maoist and counter-Maoist revolution grew within the universities and the urban middle classes, many a forum discussed the possibility, the feasibility, of using the mass entertainment industry to infiltrate a bit of implicit propaganda. Where were the "committed" filmmakers and financiers? Why was there not a Jane Fonda or Vanessa Redgrave amongst the stars?

Such questioning led to scant change. I can describe one or two films whose story, going through the turgid twists of plot that makes the genre the mass-catcher it is, ends up with some declaration of the ultimate power of the people. One such film, *Namak Haram,* was viewed and reviewed, assessed and reassessed, for its subliminal political effect. It featured two heroes, united in adopted brotherhood, divided by the schisms of capitalism—one is the owner, one the union leader in a factory. The film was popular. The attempt to transmit a message hadn't choked it. Very many reviewers were not satisfied. It hadn't posed to its audiences the overthrow of the landlord-capitalist state.

What these reviewers miss is that there is in Indian films an *implicit* politics, a framework of value as clear as that in European mystery plays and their contemporary cinematic counterpart, the Western. No one has sought to define, with any degree of accuracy or pretension (I am thinking here of the sociopsychological theses written on "Dallas" or "Dynasty" or the perennial British TV soap "Coronation Street") what this political framework of value is. It is difficult to do. It is like debating whether Shakespeare was a monarchist or a democrat. One may quote bits of *Henry V* and *Coriolanus* and come to contradictory conclusions. With Shakespeare, as with the Bombay film, it is perhaps best to take the distanced view and, ignoring the detailed quotation one may use in evidence, ask first what the major political question of the era was.

For Shakespeare it was surely hereditary monarchy. Through play after play he wrestled with the question. The time, as all times, was undoubtedly out of joint. So how do we view a man who was born

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to put it right and finds himself lacking? Shakespeare doesn't like weak kings. He allows them to have their say but inevitably demonstrates the justice of their replacement, by force of arms if necessary. His final word on the question is probably *King Lear*. He now seems sure of his politics. He has finished with itemizing the virtues of the perfect person to fill the political voids his plots create, and has set down to create such a person. He puts Edgar through difficult paces, makes him a fugitive, a servingman, a peasant, a fisherman, a beggarman, a madman, a poor Tom and leads him through this obstacle-course apprenticeship to the throne. The man who would be king must go through the hell the common folk go through in order to be crowned.

We don't know whether Elizabethan critics treated Lear and the play's messages as escapism for the groundlings. We know for certain that they didn't characterize the drama as the death throes of the feudal settlement. It is neither fanciful nor capricious to believe that a Shakespearian audience collaborated with the players and the playwright to the extent that in Edgar, in Autolycus, in the clowns and rogues, the Falstaffs and the Pucks and Ariels, they found what today would be labeled by our meritocracy as "escapism." It is precisely this level of escapism and identity that I believe the Indian film audiences in their billions seek with the characters of film.

The works of Shakespeare are not the perfect comparison, but in one particular they are germane. The Indian film throughout presents the ideas of an old society battling with and resisting modernity. All that is good is seen as being contained in the consciousness, essentially a peasant consciousness, of the hero and heroines who are faced with the dilemmas of a people who strive to keep faith with the imagined virtues of a settled world. The heroes are akin to Edgar and Hamlet and Malcolm and sometimes to Falstaff and Puck and Ariel. The villains are the usurer and cozener, the Oswalds and Edmunds and bloated hypocritical Poloniuses.

Between this panorama and the realities of power in a modern India there is a connection. The Indian cinema is in this peculiar way "political." It is not the politics of the "behalfist" bourgeoisie, those filmmakers and intellectuals who crave for and set out to make the "committed" film to preach a consciousness they feel the masses need and can learn from them. It is the politics of the mass itself. The behalfists, more than do-gooders, are inevitably individuals jolted

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into their consciousness by seeing the suffering around them. The middle-class urban student's first contact with the problem of India's future is the maimed and mutilated humanity that crawls into the city from the outlying hamlets and remote peninsulas to beg. Some make the transition from naked pity to theory to determination and then look at the options open to them. They join political parties, do good work as cadres, turn their backs on the exploitative life styles of the middle classes—or they look for the cultural weapon with which they can transform the consciousness of the millions and make them ready for the revolution. The peasantry and the urban masses meanwhile blissfully ignore this improving brand of cinema and flock to the popular Hini or Tamil or Kannada movie. They don't observe the lineaments of suffering, they live it.

For successive generations of these masses, the Indian film has been the central genre of their imagination. A small indication that this imaginative genre has some political power is the fact that some of their legislative leaders emerge from the world of cinema. In two states of the south, the chief ministers, the leaders of the state governments, are ex–film stars. Not trade-union leaders, not leaders of mass revolts of the peasantry, not student leaders elevated by their rhetoric into positions of party leadership, but film stars. In the last general election the population elected three from this pantheon to the Lok Sabha (the House of Commons). Three stars of the national screen stood for parliament on the Congress Party ticket and won, each against the strongest political opposition from the other parties.

In Allahabad, the most famous of them all, Amitabh Bachhan—a sort of combination Clint Eastwood, Robert Redford, Bruce Lee, and Dustin Hoffman (to name but a few constituents of this composite mythological man)—fought H. N. Bahuguna, veteran of the Congress, floor-crosser, cynic, pragmatist, man of experience, acknowledged wheeler-dealer. Amitabh wiped the floor with him. In the south, the screen dancer and actress Vijayantimala, and in Maharashtra the actress Sunil Dutt, were swept—as it were by acclaim, ballot boxes jammed to the full—to legislative responsibility. A few years before them, with no Congress tide in his favor, N. T. Rama Rao, the Telugu film star with hundreds of mythological portrayals of gods to his credit, formed a new regional party and carried it to power in Andhra Pradesh. He became its chief minister and, after an attempt by none other than Rajiv Gandhi to topple his

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regime, like some reincarnated avatar of the Krishna he was wont to play, survived a heart operation and won resoundingly against the Congress wave that swept the rest of the country.

Even by the account of their opponents and detractors, there was no cynical or backhanded urge in the decision of the electors, as there might have been, say, in America ("For God's sake stop this man acting, make him president"). Nor for an instant must one believe, as do some of those ready to scoff at the intelligence of the Indian electorate, that this most sophisticated of democracies had fallen into the naiveté of believing that the candidates they voted for were in fact the characters they played; that they were voting for Moses and not Charlton Heston, for M. K. Gandhi and not Ben Kingsley. A complex sophistication was at play.

I believe, they believed—despite the financial and sexual scandals that are dragged through the press day in and day out, more persistent in the papers than the doings of Lady Di—that those who lived through the representation of morality a million times, must somewhere in their souls be touched by it. The films were a public vow, something to live up to. And the fact that they were stinking rich already didn't stand in the way. Pay thy police, that temptation may not touch them.

The politics of the Indian film doesn't simply overflow into parliamentary election of actors and actresses. In India they haven't simply touched a nerve, they've put toll-gates on a main artery. Abroad, they have done the equivalent of Coca-colonization, in a region of the globe that is ripe for empathy. They carry abroad a nationalistic message, but somehow that message is not narrowly Indian. The following lyrics come from another film, another song, a film called *Awaara* (gypsy-rogue, wanderer, the rootless one):

> Mera Jhoot hai Japani
> Ye Patloon Inglistani
> Sur pey lal topi Russi
> Phir bhi dil hai Hindustani.

Which, again roughly translated, means:

> The shoes I'm wearing are made in Japan
> My trousers fashioned in England
> The red cap on my head is Russian
> In spite of it all my heart is Indian.

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The sort of thing to strike a chord in many a place in our troubled globe. (*Awaara* was made in the fifties. If it was remade today, there would no doubt be some allusion to an American consumer product, even though imports to India are only available on the black market.)

India makes two feature films a day. It exports them to Africa, the Far East, China, the Middle East, and the Soviet Union. Just as the cartographers of the British Empire colored the maps red to claim them, if the exporters of Indian films marked in saffron, or light green, the territories where their product travels and is popular, we would have a map of that part of the world in which development meets underdevelopment, where a peasantry and an urban population live side by side and are often the same people. It is that part of the world which lives through a clash of innocence and experience (remember that the Soviet Union is not all Russia). It is where the settled life of the village comes into contact with the temptation and even the routines of the city, the factory, the commodity, the market. When you boil it down, the whole of Indian cinema is a celebration of truth, love, justice, brotherhood, of a sense of order that millions know they are leaving behind even though they also know they never possessed it. The plots are tangles that would exhaust Karpov and Kasparov. (Fortunately, many of them—including the ones excerpted in this piece—are untangled in a recent United Kingdom Channel 4 publication *Indian Cinema*.) Their sense of fate makes Californian astrologers look like healthy sceptics. Their drama is not a conflict of two rights, it's the clash of righteousness of the sufferer with the greed and maliciousness of the rich, the knowing, the slick, the powerful.

The absolute classic of the mode is *Mother India*. Set in rural India, the film tells the moving story of Radha, a virtuous village woman who faces extreme hardship so that her family can survive with dignity. Following an accident, Shamu, Radha's husband, loses both his arms and leaves his family in shame as he can no longer provide for them. Radha is left alone to face life's trials. She brings up her children and fights the misfortunes that befall them. One of her sons, Birju, as a young man vows to take revenge on the village moneylender who has exploited and cheated the family for years. In the character of Radha we see strength, determination, devotion, and virtue. Radha becomes a model mother figure for the entire village because of her courage and sense of honour.

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Mother India was made in 1957. It remains a golden oldie, rescreened at every celebration of the Indian cinema because it captures the essential romance of rural endurance with a barefaced, almost shameless lack of irony (even Shakespeare's Forests of Arden were said not to be all they seemed to the dreamers who adopted them). Very early on, the Indian film entered the debate of heredity vs. environment, the latter being the trap of visciousness or fate, the former winning through. A long list of films used the plot of a boy separated at birth from his true parents, the two brothers who grew up, one as a cop, the other as a robber.

The first of these to get the acclaim it deserved was *Awaara*. Here's the plot:

> The film is set in Bombay where Raj grows up with his mother and does not know that he is the son of a noted judge, Raghunath. Raj's life is dominated by the bandit Jagga who teaches him to steal and follow in his dishonest footsteps. Raj meets his childhood friend, Rita, whose guardian is none other than Judge Raghunath. Raj and Rita fall in love and because of the love that Raj feels for Rita, he decides to reform and stop thieving. Jagga, the bandit, will not be dismissed so easily [Falstaff?] and Raj is compelled to kill him in order to be rid of the evil force in his life. Rita, who is a lawyer, defends Raj and although he is jailed for three years, he knows that both Rita and his own father await him.

Forgiveness, reconciliation, the hand of justice in the mailed fist of the law, all enter again in 1961 with *Gunga Jumna*.The film is named, as are the two protagonists, after the holy rivers of northern India. No need for subtlety here.

> The story of two brothers, Gunga and Jumna. Gunga takes to crime after he has been unjustly framed for one he did not commit. His brother, Jumna, in desperation for work, becomes a police officer. Gunga is in love with his childhood friend, Dhannu, and they marry and live in the hills from where Gunga and his band of lawbreakers operate. When Gunga is to become a father, he decides that Dhannu and he must return to his village. Gunga hopes that the villagers will forgive them if they were to ask for pardon. The two brothers finally confront each other and, despite the love they feel, justice must be done.

Variations on the same theme recur endlessly. It matters not to the groundlings that the Bombay they see, the policemen who are portrayed, the stilted dialogue, the archetypal characterization of

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hero and villain alike, bear no resemblance to the real India; the India of film is a territory of the imagination. Its central failure as "art" is that it gives the audience what the audience expects. It is shaped by its audiences and rarely sets out to shape that audience's imagination.

It is a celebration of the Indian self, not as it is, but as it is enjoined to be by nationalism, religion, and folk tradition. Bruce Lee is not a legend with the youth of the world because they are silly enough to believe that a man can stop bullets or a hundred villains with his bare hands, but because he is the embodiment of the poor, bare, forked animal capable of winning against a world of computers and nuclear weaponry.

Indian cinema began as an offshoot of nationalism. The early instinct was to show that "we can do it too," and the subjects chosen, by those who saw at the turn of the century that the medium was going to convey some message, were those that would boost national pride. The Raj brought the kinematograph to India in 1896, and by 1901 Indians were making their own films. The first documentary to be shot was *Return of Wrangler Pranjpye*, the celebration of a Maharashtrian who had earned a top degree in mathematics at Cambridge. It had the makings of a local-boy-made-good show, and it attracted a select audience of that section of the middle class that wanted equality of administrative responsibility with the British—the baby bourgeoisie.

In twelve years time the cinema had transformed its ambition. It wanted to be a medium for the masses. The easiest, or most obvious, subject for consideration in the days before Gandhi had transformed the Indian National Congress into a mass party and mass movement by imitating the life-style of the masses, was the rediscovery of Hindu myth. The first "feature" made by the pioneer D.G. Phalke was the story of *Raja Hrishchandra* (1913). It was taken from the *Mahabharata,* India's *Iliad,* and was a story that was passed on by the vast majority of viewers as part of the verbal tradition. Others followed. The pre–First World War films were nearly all either documentaries about the achievement of Indians or tales retold from the epics.

Nationalism only subsequently stretched to satire. The masses had been awakened to the potential of cinema; they knew what it was *for.* We can perhaps date the awakening of a satirical political conscience in Indian cinema from the making of *England Returned* (1921),

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which lampooned the habits and difficulties of those Indians who had adopted the ways of the masters.

The twist to satire indicates that the audiences for the new medium were now united, middle classes and urban poor, in a nationalistic consciousness. The newspapers of the time did a brisk trade in anti-British and anti–Indian-Royalist satire. Putting it on screen was a novelty, but not one that lasted. Producers in the Nationalist Movement turned to what they thought were more important subjects.

The late twenties and early thirties saw the birth of the "social" film, a description that persists into our own time. In 1924, two of the pioneers of the Indian screen, Ardeshir Irani and Naval Gandhi, both Parsees from the minority Zoroastrian community of western India, set up the Majestic Film Company with its own studios. The second film made by the new company was called *Razia Begum* and told the story of a Muslim queen who fell in love with a Hindu slave. The film was a conscious intervention in nationalist politics. The leaders of the Congress Movement, now being steered, though not dominated, by Mahatma Gandhi (not Naval) made it clear that it stood, not simply for noncooperation with the British Raj, but for a cleansing of national life which included—apart from the quirky ideas about sex and diet which Gandhi followed—the amity between religions, non-sectarian consciousness, the fight against untouchability, and other forms of religious backwardness. *Razia Begum* caused a storm. It did the makers, who were Parsee, no harm, but the poor exhibitor, Dhiren Ganguly, the maker of *England Returned,* who now owned cinema houses, was ordered to pack his bags and projectors and leave the Muslim state of the Nizam of Hyderabad at ruinous cost.

As the nationalist movement gained momentum, other filmmakers pulled into the celluloid arena the other taboo subjects of the Indian social settlement. In the thirties, *Achhut Kanya* (*Untouchable Girl*) tackled the plight of the lower castes. A newspaper of the time, *The Hindu,* reviewed it:

> Devika Rani [the actress] appears as a Harijan girl in love with a Brahmin youth, portrayed by Ashok Kumar. Caste barriers and religious bigotry stand in the way of their union. The boy is forced into a marriage to a wife he cannot love and the girl to one of her own class. Wisely [sic], afraid of their love, they keep out of each other's way, till chance throws them together at a village fair. Inflamed by jealousy and egged on by neighbours,

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the girl's husband mistakes this meeting and a fierce encounter ensues between the Brahmin youth and the untouchable husband on a level-crossing. A train comes on. The girl, in an effort to part the combatants, is run over and killed, a human sacrifice at the altar of bigotry.

The remarkable thing about the review is that it appears in a reformist newspaper, using the medium of review to make its editorial pronouncement against the unshakeable caste laws of Hindu society. The notable point of the plot is the railway train, the irony of the sacrifice at the altar of modernism. The subliminal message is, of course, as Kipling never tired of pointing out, using the same image of trains and railway bridges in his short stories, that the quarrels of one age need not coexist with the technology of another. The train is progress, blind as love—it cannot differentiate between the cause of the quarrel and the innocent object of it. That the film didn't wipe out prejudice against inter-caste marriages is obvious.

The year after untouchability, came the turn to the corrupt practice of families selling their young daughters in marriage to old men. *Duniya Na Mane* (translated as *The Unexpected,* but literally meaning *Beyond the World's Credulity*) told the story of a girl sold by her uncle to an old man. The heroine takes a stand. She refuses to be the man's wife. She won't sleep with him or acknowledge his role as her lord and master. She teams up with his daughter who is a "social reformer" and through a contrived series of epiphanies gets the old husband to see the error of his ways, to acknowledge her as a kind of daughter, and to commit suicide to atone for his lustful dealing.

This nationalist period of filmmaking, the rise of the social film, was a period apart. The forties and, even more, the fifties and sixties mixed this "socialism" with unabashed, some would say exploitative, entertainment. The classifications that recent books on Indian cinema make are revealing, if confusing. Feroze Rangoonwalla, a scholar of some distinction on the subject, lists in his appendices to *Indian Cinema Past and Present* a thematic classification. The book covers the years until 1981. He divides the films into "social, crime, fantasy, historical, biographical, mythological, legendary, devotional, children, stunt, adventure, political, documentary, educational, horror, scientific, technical and others." He tells us that 737 films were made, and he calls 602 of these "social," 56 "crime," 3 "fantasy," and—skipping some categories that get ratings of 5, 2, 27, 11, 12, and

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one—we come to "educational." Only five films qualify for this category. What would happen if Rangoonwalla were let loose on the output of the BBC's Open University? Or for that matter, on the output of the United States' Public Broadcasting Service? How does he arrive at a clear and exclusive distinction between the social and the educational? And why, when all is charming falseness around him, does he give fantasy a score of three? No doubt Rangoonwalla can justify these categories, or perhaps they are simply the bureaucratic nonsenses of some censor board that doesn't yet own a cross-indexing computer. But to any viewer of the Indian film output of 1981 (with similar figures for the eight years before and no doubt for the three years that follow), it will be apparent that the social, the criminal, and the fantastic defy separation, and that the humble attempt of any viewer to try such a separation of theme is educational in itself.

The fact is that the certainty of the "social" categorization has gone. Life under the Nehrus and the Gandhis has become infinitely more complex. There is no translating the Mahatma's simple, obvious, and gigantic precepts into plots and themes any more. That 602 out of 737 films are "social" is not credible. There are of course more than 602 evils in Indian society, such as untouchability and religious bigotry and regionalism as well as corruption in political circles and dissolution in artistic ones, but they are not tackled with the fervor of *Achhut Kanya, Devdas, Razia Begum*, or the other classics of the nationalist period.

It is paradoxical that the remoteness from naturalism gives Indian films their bite. The most popular ones, those that have made Indian cinema an international phenomenon, are almost always musical extravaganzas that are ever-elaborated variations on a formula (not even formulae). These recur in the story of the separated brothers, the child brought up without knowledge of his or her true parents/brothers/sisters, the loveable rogue with his fingers in the wrong pocket but his heart in the right place, the policeman whose loyalty to the state is a matter of high principle (and who is bound to be the brother, long-lost or otherwise, of the prodigal), etc. Of course, one excludes from this umbrella category the films that continue the other traditions of Indian cinema, the Rays and Mrnal Sens and Ritvik Ghataks that have made Bengali cinema the toast of international film buffs' festivals. And one excludes the clutch of commit-

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ted documentaries and features that swim against the tide, as well as the small and new phenomenon of the naturalistic film that chooses locations as they are and dialogue as one finds it to express the belief that truth is the best propaganda.

In the others, the blockbusters, the ambassadorial films that pack them in and have them crying in the aisles from Ghana to Bangkok, the curry Westerns, the feudal innocence versus city wickedness, tragedies and pathoramas, reality has different functions. To be a success and to be exported on that scale, they each have to have at least ten songs, sung preferably by the three or four playback singers who dub their voices onto the mime of the clutch of stars who are recognized from Delhi to Damascus as creatures of a dominant fantasy. When they portray the rich, they have to show marble halls and gaudy palatial dwellings with servants in livery and Mercedes gracing every porch and racing down the picturesque roads of Kashmir or some other wonderland. Obligatory are the maidens dancing impromptu and twirling themselves around trees and bushes with flirtatious gestures that give you the come on while selling you the brush off. The face studded with sweat which betokens tension, the partriarch with his stoop, spectacles on nose, pouch on side, stick in hand, which betokens benevolent old age, the paunch and the dark features of the villain who no longer has to be moutstachioed but still has to lend money at ruthless rates. They need to have all this and more. Their audience knows that life is life and film is film and one is merely an exaggeration of the other.

How did this tradition of extravagance overflow the borders of India? At the turn of the century, one Abdulally Esoofally took film that he bought from Europe in a tent with a seating capacity of a thousand to Singapore, Burma, and the Far East. He was spreading the medium as an Indian entrepreneur, but not yet as more than an imperial one. In the second decade, Dhundiraj Govind Phalke, better known as Dadasaheb Phalke, took his first productions, *Raja Hareshchandra* and *Krishna Janma* (*The Birth of Krishna*), all over India, carrying his screen and projector and reels by bullock-cart from village to village and town to town. Later, these same films and others were taken to be shown to Indian audiences in Burma, Singapore, and East Africa.The market had been prepared in two ways: the territories under the British Empire had settled colonies of Indians and in a deeper way had for thousands of years been

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penetrated by religions originating on the Indian mainland. The Hindu myths had passed into the blood of the East Asian countries. They were natural markets for the export of the first mythological films retelling on screen the story of the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, and the life of the Buddha.

It is natural to assume that where Indians went, they took their films with them; or that their films came to join them later and fed their nostalgia or gave them continuity with the past. But what of Turkey and the reverence in which the stars of *Awaara* were held in the bazaars of the Arab world and Africa and in the remote towns and cities of the USSR? This film of the fifties broke box-office records (as the phrase goes) in a hundred places, places that ancient Indian colonialism hadn't reached. It was dubbed into several languages in the USSR and the Middle East, and one story goes that two prints of the film were shown to North Polar expeditions that the Soviets had fielded. The story from Independent India touched a nerve, asserted some energy that needed celebration in the hearts of these populations struggling with a transition to modernity. The sincere hick in town with a compulsion to roguery, but a heart of gold, said it all. Perhaps *Awaara* established the line of communication. Other films followed and the industry spread.

So did the diaspora. The late fifties, sixties, seventies saw the movement of subcontinental labor on a mass scale. Immigrants moved from the Punjab, from Gujerat, from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), and from West Pakistan to settle in places where neither Indian people nor culture had been. To a lesser degree, they settled in Britain, in Canada, and in the United States. They went to the Persian Gulf as a reserve army of temporary labor in the thousands, if not millions.

It is not true that Punjabis and Gujeratis came to Britain and were followed by more Gujeratis from Kenya and Uganda and then by Bangladeshis fleeing the birth of their state in its painful separation from Pakistan, because they looked to Britain for culture or anything else. They didn't come clutching pictures of the Queen, neither did they come to visit the birth place of Shakespeare. They came in quest of jobs and opportunity, to escape persecution, and simply because there was nowhere else to go: the same old diasporic tale. They went to the Gulf because Indian technicians had preceded them and made way for the movement of labor.

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The Gulf is infested with Indian labor and with the Indian moving image. Britain, Canada, the United States are not. The diaspora spread the seeds of moving imagery through Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore to the East and through the Arab lands to Africa, and to the West. And some of the seed fell on stony ground. The Indian movie industry is restricted to the ghettoes or the districts and spreads of the Asian population in Canada and in Britain. Though Indian films of all sorts are shown on the national network in Britain, it is safe to say (and the research bears out the notion) that only a very small number of the natives watch them, at least those of the Bombay film industry variety. Satyajit Ray and Mrnal Sen have some standing in the audiences that go to the British Film Theatre or to the Arts. The British working class doesn't flock to see a re-screening of *Mother India* or give the video trade, which depends on the Asian population, young and old, a market. In Britain, Canada, the United States, and whatever other Western Countries where Indians are to be found, the Indian film remains an alien peepshow, an inaccessible slice of culture.

Neither will it catch on in time. The moment has passed. That same Elizabethan audience that appreciated the enthronement of Edgar or the mischief of Autolycus may have been, with a little coaching in Hindi and the felicities of Urdu, in the metaphysical frame of mind to have extended their patronage to the Hindi film. The modern Britain is not. And this is not because, as one lobby maintains, the British working class is hostile to all manifestations of a foreignness, that it is implacably xenophobic, and when Xeno is black or brown it's worse. Take as an example, to digress for a moment, the popularity for one generation of the American ballad singer, say Bob Dylan. An even better example is the other Bob—the reggae poet Bob Marley. His Rastafarian convictions, Jamaican patois, constant reference to the locales of his island, have not served as barriers to his gaining international popularity and an answering echo in the hearts of millions of youths in Europe and America. Marley is the best-known Jamaican ever, the singer whose revolutionary energy set loose a resonance in the populations of other continents. The messages are simple; the oppression of which he sings is seen to be universal and not pathetic; the image is something the meannest punk can accommodate and idealize. Not so with Sonny Dyal or Amitab Bachhan or the latest heartthrob of the Indian screen,

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Jackie Shroff. They speak to populations essentially not yet disciplined and alienated by the routines and relationships of modern production. They speak to those in Africa and Indonesia who have one foot in the rural realities and cruelties of the past and one aspiring foot in the urbanity of the twentieth century—all our futures.

Sections of the Western population can and do find that the discovery of India leads them to spiritual homes that can be turned into real estate. Allen Ginsberg may have started it, following the trail scent that Swami Vivekananda and other sojourners laid before the turn of the century. The United States was then a country that had not played host to the cultures of South Asia. They had done so to Africa, Europe, and Eastern Europe, to the Italians, Japanese, Chinese, the Germanic genius and the Waspish base, but of India they knew nothing. The Queen's subjects had been indentured to Southern Africa, to the West Indies, but none to the new continent. Vivekananda took, in the spirit of spreading Indian nationalism, the "culture" of India abroad, a very sophisticated version of Hindu mystical philosophy. Alan Ginsberg led the hips and the hippies down the discovery trail to the banks of the Ganges. The Beatles, following a fashion, followed. They laid the foundation for the second largest public-relations export of India—fake mysticism, the religion that promises that you can keep everything you've got, even get a little more through using its disciplines, and flatter yourself with being in touch with a cosmos that the development of your own history denies. The gurus drive more Mercedes and Rolls Royces than the film stars. As entrepreneurs, they have chosen their market more carefully. The Indian film goes out to the poor from the banks of the Ganges, mysticism only to the rich. The image of mother India is badly served by both. Beneath the mysticism that is supposed to invest the Indian personality are centuries of rural suffering that supply the themes of the Indian cinema.

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Judith Wechsler

The Filming of Art

THE REVOLUTIONARY Russian filmmaker Dziga Vertov wrote about his *Man with a Movie Camera* in 1923:

I'm an eye. A mechanical eye. I, the machine, show you a world the way only I can see it. I free myself for today and forever from human immobility. . . . Freed from the boundaries of time and space, I coordinate any and all points of the universe, wherever I want them to be. My way leads towards the creation of a fresh perception of the world. Thus I explain in a new way the world unknown to you.

Vertov's declaration applies not only to films *as* art, but also to films *on* art. And yet films on art have not yet had a powerful and pervasive effect on the ways we see.

Films on art depend on close collaboration between the art historian/critic/theorist and the filmmaker. Both the art historian and filmmaker are able, within their respective disciplines, to increase our awareness of visual forms. But the collaboration, which should lead to a deeper understanding of works of art through visual means, has fallen short.

No one seriously questions the impact of the written word. From scholarly monographs to coffee-table books, publications on art flourish. But these studies do not necessarily succeed in teaching us to see more deeply or more clearly. Much writing in art history advances the discourse in the field but is unlikely to inform the eye of one unfamiliar with its polemics. Films, however, with their capacity to present visual material visually and to reach a broader audience, have the potential to enhance visual literacy more effectively than

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publications can. Our ability to read visual signs and structures could be as fully developed and expressive a cognitive mode as language.[1]

Films on art are both more and less accessible than written texts. Few of the hundred or so films on art that are made a year in the United States are broadcast nationally on prime-time PBS, but those that are reach an estimated audience of fifteen to twenty million viewers. Beyond broadcast, though, it is difficult to find those programs or other noteworthy films on art again—even for a professional in the field.[2]

The lack of impact of films on art is due, not only to drawbacks in modes of distribution, but in the shortcomings of many films. For the most part, we have not yet developed a vocabulary and syntax for presenting art history visually. The filmmaker draws on the resources of film to find structural equivalents to the art object, its surface, composition, scale, and its relation to other works and to its context. There are some basic procedures: choice of vantage point; selection of detail and its relationship to a larger segment or whole; composition, the framing of a shot; lighting; camera movement, both direction and speed; panning, akin to moving one's eye across a scene or surface; zooming, the effect of a continuous movement towards or away from a subject; transitions—fades in and out, dissolves (fusing one shot into another), and direct cuts. How these devices are used and combined, the context in which one places the work of art, the relationship drawn between background information and interior complexity all deeply affect our comprehension. Film is not just the accretion of images. To achieve a pictorial montage is very difficult. Using sequences and spatial relations, connections can be drawn, not only among widely dispersed objects, but also among concepts. The image, the art object, needs to be presented in a way that highlights its features visually. The principle argument for films on art, then, is not just that they can reach a broader audience in a more entertaining way than can most publications, but that a film, wisely made, can lead the viewer to see more intelligently, more knowingly. Rudolf Arnheim has described our cognitive mode as essentially perceptive—thinking takes place in images.[3] Film would thus seem the ideal medium for presenting cognitive processes perceptually and so be a prime method of developing visual literacy. By means of its camerawork and editing, film can suggest a way of looking. Before addressing this possibility in greater detail, however, we need to take

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a critical look at the means (and limitations) of filmmaking, as well as the contribution art historians, critics, and theorists can bring to its realization.

Filmmakers need to get over the impulse to move the camera for the sake of movement, to frame the image for drama as such, to add music for fear of silence. Films often include excursions to locations that bear only a tangential relationship to the subject. Intensive focus on works of art is considered by some to be insufficiently "filmic." There is concern that the art object demands concentration and, at the same time, may not be compelling enough—and so "real" scenes are interposed for relief. But I think the work of art needs to be explored on its own terms. It is helpful if the filmmaker understands the underlying theoretical and historical issues, the nature of schemas, and the dynamics of artistic styles. The art historian needs to trust that one can indicate and analyze, not solely with words, but by directing the viewer's gaze. The specialized written language of art history needs to be relinquished or at least tempered for the screen. One cannot say the same things in the same way in film: words are used more sparingly than in a published work. Still, the filmscript is very important. Scriptwriting is a specialized form, keyed to images and closely timed; the writer and director have to work in close collaboration. The advice of a scriptwriter or script editor can be salutary. Emphasis in film should be on showing, comparing, and contrasting by means of images and selection of details.

Certain subjects are more appropriate for visual examination than others. Critical theory, aesthetics, issues of provenance, are less suited to film than is examination of the art object itself and the artifacts of its milieu. The development of pictorial conventions, the representation of the figure, of space, time, and movement, can all be *shown*. The process by which a work of art comes about—something not revealed in the presence of the art object itself—can also be suggested in film by showing preliminary studies and other works that have affected its development.

Most films on art have focused on the modern period. It is difficult to find consistent statistics, but of the 450 films selected by the Canadian Centre for Films on Art, 207 are on the modern period and nineteen on the Renaissance; there are two films on Michelangelo, nine on Picasso.[4] It seems that issues that cannot be dealt with biographically or by filming painters or sculptors discussing their

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work (or better still, at work) are often avoided. Even in films on the Renaissance, the emphasis is primarily on the artist as hero. Kenneth Clark's *Civilization* (1969) has two programs on this period: "Man—The Measure of all Things," on the Renaissance of Florence, Urbino, and Mantua; and "The Hero as Artist," on papal Rome in the early sixteenth century (focusing on Michelangelo, Raphael, and Leonardo). Many historical films dwell on interpersonal struggle and triumph (Michelangelo and the Medici, Rembrandt and the burghers of Amsterdam, Picasso and his wives and mistresses) rather than on understanding the struggle within the process of making a work of art. The recent three-part BBC series "Raphael," though, manages to balance the biographical with a detailed look at the work.

Showing the context in which a particular work of art is made is often done at the expense of investigating the extent to which art derives from art. I am not suggesting a modernist view, that art develops solely within the parameters of its own discipline, but that art develops in response to art, as well as to visible reality. The way artists choose to represent history, genre, portraits, and landscapes is formed, not only or even primarily in response to records of an event, a motif, or a model, but to a large degree by conventions of iconography, composition, and style. For this reason, much of art history deals with the history of precedent and the impact of various influences. Film has an advantage, in that it can actually *show* how certain motifs, techniques, and schemata evolve, and indicate visually the relationship among works.

Students of filmmaking rarely confront the concerns of those disciplines they set out to document. Filmmakers often assume that making a film on art is no different from making a film on any other subject. But there are many technical aspects, as well as theoretical issues, that need to be learned. Universities and schools with film, art, and art history departments could experiment collaboratively on the problems posed by translating from one visual medium to another. Students of art history might also profit, not only from learning how to draw (a skill that is rarely required), but also from preparing story boards and participating in the production of films on art. The students' experience of visualizing an argument might also enhance the use of illustrative material in lectures.

Is it the filmmaker's choice or limitations, or is it also the market reading of audience interest, that has prevented films on art from

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becoming more sophisticated art historically? Museum attendance is greater than ever, and it would seem there is an audience eager for orientation and information on the fine arts. When good films on art are made, they are received enthusiastically. Yet television networks are concerned that films on art are too educational and not sufficiently entertaining for prime-time public broadcast.

This article will trace some of the special properties and effects that film can bring to the understanding of art objects and the history of art; it will summarize the different kinds of films on art; finally, it will discuss the relationship of words to images in film and the role of space and time as added to the still image.

* * *

Films can provide both a broader and closer look at works of art than can most publications: "broader" in the sense of setting the context visually; "closer" in the sense of providing a detailed visual examination of the art object. Film can also effectively present history through its artifacts, through the ways in which people and societies have given visual shape to their experiences.[5] Works of art, artifacts, and information from widely scattered sources and periods can be brought together visually in film. The art object can be shown in context: one can indicate where it was made, how the medium and format is in part dictated by the function and space for which it was intended, and the conditions under which it was and is seen. Film can suggest visually a balance of established practice and innovation, the deliberations of the artist, the processes a work undergoes in its development, the constraints and possibilities of a given medium. Art historical issues can be raised on a more popular and accessible level—dealing with questions of pictorial conventions, genres, and taste. The relationship of art and science, art and society can actually be *shown*. Films on art could be conceived in different modes or styles reflecting ways of teaching, kinds of exhibitions, critical and aesthetic positions. The tyrannical quality of film might be offset by suggesting various interpretations—for example, taking a work of art and showing it from different viewpoints, both in the text and by means of camerawork.

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But the goal of films on art is not only to increase our knowledge about the art presented, but to encourage overall greater visual literacy. By becoming aware of how images develop, and how traditions are established and broken, we not only understand individual works of art better; we can also help offset the taste for, and impact of, the glitzy, fast-paced commercial images that comprise much of the visual media today. And yet, some critics regard the making of films on art as presumptuous—and almost bound to failure. Critics frequently compare films on art with scholarly books and catalogues, without considering that the two media are of such different orders that the information presented by each has a different function. The art history profession is not generally concerned with making the field accessible to the general public; there is perhaps a sense that this would reduce a "high" art to a "low" one. The studies of connoisseurship, iconography, patronage, and criticism that typify much of art-historical research cannot be carried out as effectively in film. Documents need to be analyzed and arguments developed in too great detail. Film is better concerned with how we look at works of art. Current scholarship should be taken into account in deciding how and what to film within a particular subject, but the polemics need to be presented visually. The filmmaker tries to find a way to convey the style of an artist, not only by his choice of images and text, but in the "look" of the film—its pacing, framing, and lighting.

The filmmaker re-presents the original work, sets the viewers' pace of looking, determines the details on which they must focus. But isn't the work of art itself sufficient? Of course, but once you bring art to film, or bring film to art, then you draw on all your resources to enliven the experience of looking. In a sense, you are offering something different in place of the original experience of confronting a work. A film on art is not intended to take the place of looking at the original; rather, it hopes to enhance our understanding and perceptions—both of which may be lacking even when one is looking directly at the original work.

The challenge to the filmmaker is to develop the interface between art and film, to find appropriate ways of translating a still, silent image into a moving, talking picture. But how do movement, narration, and music enhance, rather than divert, our perception and understanding? When we look at paintings, more than our visual sense is aroused. And part of the "beholder's share" is all that one

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brings to it;[6] this includes information as well as sensory experience. We participate actively with all our senses when we "take in" a painting, sculpture, or drawing. We talk about having a "feeling for something," of being "moved" by a work.[7] That kinaesthetic aspect of looking at a work of art—a live three-dimensional moving body in front of a three-dimensional object—has to be evoked by other means in film: through camera angles, composition, movement, and montage.

When one writes, directs, and edits a film on art, one imposes a way of looking. The alternative to guiding the viewer's eye is to reproduce the work without camera moves, without detail. But movies call for movement—otherwise a slide presentation would suffice. This does not mean that the camera must continually be in motion. Many times it is best to present paintings still, either as the establishing shot—before the camera begins to focus on a detail or pan across the surface—or at the end. Details without reference to the overall work can be disorienting. In any case, movement should be used judiciously and details chosen with great deliberation. When we translate from one medium to another, we do so with the hope of enhancing the experience of looking under different circumstances.

GENRES OF FILMS ON ART

Films on art comprise a genre, a subcategory, of cultural programs. They are not quite like other documentaries except when they record a living artist or the staging of an event or exhibition. The most convenient narrative structure is biographical; the artist's life provides the story line. There are basically three kinds of biographical films: the Hollywood-variety dramatization of a painter's life, such as *Lust for Life* or *The Agony and the Ecstasy;* more substantial, less melodramatic biographies, such as Peter Watkin's excellent film on Edvard Munch, in which paintings and prints play a significant role; and biographies that provide a structure for presenting the artist's work, such as the recent film on Hodler by Jura Bruschwiler, or Perry Miller Adato's films on Picasso and Mary Cassatt.

The profile as developed by journalism and radio and adopted by film and television (interviews, personal revelations) comprises a subset of the biographical film. The viewer typically gets an idiosyncratic glimpse of the artists and their way of speaking about their

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work. The camera may occasionally turn to the art object, but its principle concern is with the artist and the ambience, not with the work of art itself. One of the more engaging examples of this genre is Aline Saarinen's interview with Alexander Calder. In this genre, commitment to an interpretation is often avoided. Interviewers ask artists or their colleagues, "and what did you think of . . .?" While the profile is not to be dismissed as a genre, it does not draw on the full capabilities of film or video.

Documentation of living artists, particularly at work, is of course invaluable, particularly to the student of art and art history. The best of its kind are Hans Namuth and Paul Falkenberg's now classic film of Jackson Pollock pouring and dripping paint, and Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Le Mystère Picasso,* which shows Picasso painting on glass. In these, film serves to document the movement that precedes the finished product. Michael Blackwood's forty-three films, grouped collectively under the title *The Art of This Century,* is a most valuable archive of painters, sculptors, and architects, filmed in a straightforward fashion with emphasis on the process of work.[8]

Films are often made in conjunction with exhibitions. The Metropolitan Museum of Art has recently established an Office of Film and Television, under the direction of Karl Katz, to produce films in conjunction with exhibitions such as Eighteenth-Century Woman, Van Gogh, and Manet, and for broadcast on PBS and ABC Arts and Entertainment Cable Network. Other films designed to accompany exhibitions include one on Picasso for the Museum of Modern Art (1980) and one on Pissarro (1981) for Boston's Museum of Fine Arts and the Louvre. These films, intended to enhance the viewer's understanding of the exhibition, often include works that are not in the show, along with background and comparative material suggested in the catalogue essay but not actually exhibited. Films can be like "museums without walls": they can extend the lifetime of an exhibition and reach an audience of unprecedented size. For example, the very popular Van Gogh exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum drew 624,120 visitors over its three-month run. The PBS broadcast of the Van Gogh film one evening in New York had an estimated audience of half a million, and fifteen to twenty million watched its national broadcast.

Another type of films on art is modeled, in part, on educational television programs, which often feature an on-camera host—an

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all-knowing guide who serves as mediator to the material, providing continuity, and engaging and convincing the audience by means of personality, like a good teacher. (The best and best-known of these was Kenneth Clark.) One advantage to the visible narrator, the "talking head," is that the filmmaker can worry less about transitions between scenes and is freed from having to match closely image and text. Too often, though, the on-camera host stands *between* the viewer and the object, not as a screen or lens, but as an obstacle: the work of art should be the true protagonist. One hosted series that was successful in this regard was Robert Hughes's *Shock of the New,* where forceful interpretations brought together a range of twentieth-century art forms. The opposite of the all-knowing on-camera paternal narrator is exemplified in the series *Ways of Seeing,* one of the few programs to deal with the process of perception. In this four-part series, the English art historian and novelist John Berger, together with the filmmaker Michael Dibb, invite the viewer to explore the relationship between the visual arts and the reality they reflect. Berger adopts a sociological and polemical approach in addressing the process of perception.

A more specialized genre includes films that are structured around certain texts. This is a particularly French mode with its semiotic concern with the role of the text. The films based on Diderot's essay on the Salons and Sartre's writings on Tintoretto were sponsored by French national educational institutions. Paintings often tell stories, and films are generally constructed as narratives. But films do not necessarily follow or even highlight the plot of a painting. A fine exception is a series produced by the BBC and RM Arts, *One Hundred Masterpieces of Painting,* a collaborative project between art historians and filmmakers. These ten-minute films were shown in twenty-five countries. Broadcast in the United States some years ago, they are now quite unavailable here.

Films that take as their starting point the process by which a work of art is created lend themselves to active exploration by the camera. Michael Dibb's film on drawing explores the range of uses, styles, and expressions by amateurs, art students, and artists (David Hockney and Jim Dine). Here, the camera technique, editing, balance of narration, and visual material all work to great advantage.

Films by artists comprise a different genre from film on art.[9] Many painters, sculptors, and photographers have made films an extension

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of their activity. In the 1920s, the surrealists produced films that used dream-like juxtapositions of objects and subjects: Man Ray's *L'Etoile de Mer* and *L'Age D'Or*. Leger's *Ballet Méchanique*, Schlemmer's *Triadische Ballet*, Moholy-Nagy's *Light Display, Black, White and Grey*, and Sheeler and Strand's *Manhatta* extended the artists' plastic and still art through movement and time. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, environmental artists documented their work in film: Robert Smithson's *Spiral Getty;* Christo's *Valley Curtain*, directed by David and Albert Maysles. Current video artists such as Ed Emschwiller and Peter Campus began as painters or sculptors before turning to the video-generated image. And we will surely see a great increase in the production of computer-generated images in the years ahead. There is already a major body of experimental work on film and video as art—but that is beyond the scope of this article.

WORDS AND IMAGES

The text of a film can serve two functions. It can duplicate the information given in the art object, or it can add fresh information. Narration is often most effective when its message is oblique to the image—providing additional information rather than describing what is on the screen. Roland Barthes, in his *Image—Music—Text*, distinguished between "anchorage" and "relay" as the two primary ways that the linguistic message functions with regard to the iconic message. The text or narration that fixes the image is there to respond to the question "What is it?" It helps to identify the elements of the scene and to focus the viewer's understanding and interpretation; it "holds the connoted meanings from proliferating." (The caption for a photograph works in this same way.)[10] Narration can effectively point out something about the work before you, something about what has come before or what is about to come. (Identifying artists in the spoken narration can be curiously difficult: sequence of names with pauses is usually awkward.)

The other kind of text, which Barthes identifies as "relay," advances the action by setting out in the sequence of messages meanings that are not to be found in the image itself.[11] Narration, then, provides a conceptual or historical framework. It is very difficult, though, to establish and develop a theoretical discourse in the text of a film: there is so little time, the image is primary and

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specific, and the narration is directly linked to image in space and time. Bernard Noël, a French film theorist, observed that "speech has a linear speed—the intensity of painting is related to its immobility." Editing of the film seeks to displace immobility by making the painted image "speak."[12]

Words pin an image down: images are more multivalent. The narration in a film on art focuses the viewer's attention to a specific interpretation and does not leave time to suggest alternatives. When we read a book on art, we look at the illustration, stop to think, reread a passage, or go on: we do not "hear" the words at the same moment that we are looking. However, with the new video technology, cassettes, and discs, viewers can now stop at a particular image at their own pace.

Scripts are often best written with keen attention to the duration and "tone" of the words heard over the images. The story line is developed with sequences of images in mind. A shooting script is then prepared, which includes the text and description of what one is seeking on location, along with suggestions for points of view and durations. A storyboard correlates image and text on a precise time-line, particularly for animation camera work. After one has finished shooting and has done a rough edit of all the sequences, the footage often suggests another approach, or even a sub-plot. Only then does one begin to write precisely to the image. The play of image and text, the placement and timing, are critical; fractions of seconds can make a vast difference. The rhythm of the film is determined, above all, in the editing.

TIME AND SPACE

The challenge before the filmmaker is how to present a painting, which is spatial, in a time frame. The dynamics of a painting are suggested in the pacing of the shots. One must first understand the composition of the work and how it achieves its effect; that understanding is then translated into movement, duration, rhythm, and tone. Painting achieves a "spacialization of time." Film takes a visual image, a spatial image, and temporalizes it. Since we have no specialized receptors for our sense of time, our sense of time must come from our other senses.[13] When we look at a painting, we bring to it the semblance of our other senses—especially the kinaesthetic

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sense of touch and balance. Film takes the limitation of sight and transcends it by drawing on the auditory sense of language, sound, and music, as well as the sense of movement. Tone, rhythm, harmony, and dissonance are responded to by all our senses.[14]

The filmmaker can trace the evolution of a work from preliminary sketches to more developed drawings to oil sketches, so that we begin to learn how the artist's thinking about a work unfolds. The development of an artistic style, the influences that play upon it, can be documented visually: the camera can dissolve from one work to the next, focusing on particular details of subject or style. Along with the closer look, one develops visually the large scope of development of periods, subjects, and styles. These are the thematic and stylistic frameworks in which time and movement are "added" to the image. The relatively short length of most films on art makes it difficult to strike a balance between a chronological and a thematic approach.

Although films on art tend to range from ten minutes to one-and-a-half hours, the duration of a film is often dictated by standard broadcast lengths. Even if the camera pans slowly across the painting, the filmmaker will only occasionally keep a single image on camera for sixty seconds. Eight, fifteen, thirty seconds may seem like a shockingly brief time, but every second counts in film. (The average museum visitor spends three seconds looking at a work of art, two of which are devoted to the written description on the label.) Television has set up the expectation of rapid movement and rapid cuts. Television network people worry that if the camera holds still on an image, moves slowly, or sets up a leisurely pace, the viewer will become bored and switch the channel. But rock video and advertising should not set the pace for a study of Velasquez. We need to establish a different standard, a different tone, to encourage greater visual understanding.

In looking at a painting, one determines one's own speed; one's thoughts range from information about the work, recollections of other works by the artist, or of that period or subject, and personal memories and associations. These are all part of the appreciative process. In film, a dense narration with music along with intensive camera work can lead to sensory overload—nothing is left to the "beholder's share." Finding the balance of all these sensory inputs is the art of this art.

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MUSIC

Music affects the interpretation of a work of art: it is often used to set the tone and to give an overall rhythm. But with its beat and sweep, music is often too suggestive, seductive, or intrusive. Used judiciously, though, music can help structure a film, demarcate transitions, and provide texture. Music contributes to our sense of an historical epoch. The same painting set to different scores is interpreted differently. Music can also be humorous. In John Huston's new film, *Prizzi's Honor,* the selections from Italian opera in the background provide a witty commentary on the contemporary gangster plot. Yet, too often music is used arbitrarily—played continuously throughout a film without clear purpose, demanding attention at the expense of the images. Sometimes it is simply inappropriate stylistically.

Recently, while making a film on the representation of the body in art, I was struggling with the section on the beginnings of abstraction, starting with Picasso's *Desmoiselles d'Avignon.* I mentioned the impact primitive art had on Picasso while he was continuing to refer to the work of Cézanne. The narration was feeble alongside the painting. Finally, I decided to shorten the text radically, and to use Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* to suggest the earth-shaking departures. In an earlier scene on the "progeny" of Titian's "Venus of Urbino" in the nudes of Velasquez, Boucher, Ingres, Manet, and Wesselman, the pictorial development was clear but the narration dry—I wanted to emphasize the continuity underlying the changes and the sense of pleasure throughout. Finally, I tried a Scarlatti harpsichord sonata (K.337); with its shifts of key and lively tempo, it advanced the scene in a spirited and titillating way.

FILM AND THE PERCEPTION OF ART

The camera is not like the eye—it is the vehicle for the filmmaker's vision. Rudolf Arnheim has pointed out that film is based on the displacement of vision—panning, zooming, cutting, fading, and dissolving.[15] Film is, of course, comprised of still images. The illusion of movement, or continuity, is given through the assembly of these moments into sequences.

The camera is designed to shoot at a calibrated pace—unlike the eye, with its rapid scanning movements. Twenty-four frames a

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second provide the illusion of continuous movement through the persistence of vision. But unlike the human eye, which can take in an infinitely broad range, the camera is limited—the lens can only take in so much, and all that we see is highly selective and in some measure fragmented. Human perception over time is continuous. In film, we create jumps in time and cut from moment to moment, view to view, in order to build up, artificially, a sense of a subject or object with the intention of telling a story, making a point, contrasting and comparing, calling attention to detail, surface, and structure. Through the camera work and, above all, the editing, filmmakers select and interpret, making new sense of what we observe.

Films on art encourage closer looking, and yet it is very difficult to transmit the grain or impasto that constitutes the painterly quality. There is the additional problem of the picture frame. If the frame is shown, it detracts from the sense of "getting into the picture." If it is cropped, the viewer is uncertain of the actual boundary of the canvas or paper. And there is the technical drawback of the vertical art object filmed from a transparency on an animation table. The image cannot fill the screen, and the black masking that borders the picture tends to flatten the image further. A related difficulty in reproducing a work of art, still or moving, is establishing a sense of scale. The movie or television screen changes the proportion between the canvas and the spectator. Filming in a studio, gallery, museum, or public space gives one indications of scale—as does the presence of people. However, when trying to evoke an historical period, it can be distracting to see our contemporaries. Filming a transparency or slide of an art object using animation or a rostrum-camera (a camera mounted on a rigid support) is a principal technique in films on art. (Since it is impractical to take a film crew to every painting, museum, or location, it is often easier to control light and color balance on the animation table by working with a high-quality photographic image.) With an animation camera, the movements are even, some say mechanical. While it is not the way the eye works, the effect is often persuasive. The camera moves with dependable smoothness, and with the aid of a computer, now linked to most advanced animation cameras, one can accelerate and decelerate moves even along a parabola.[16]

Making films is a costly business and involves many people and facilities. With the exception of very few experimental films, most

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films on art have to serve a large public in order to find funding. Potential donors sometimes have a limited notion of what the audience wants. Currently, more experimentation is taking place in video than in film: video is cheaper, produces an immediate product, is easier to edit, and has many more technical capacities for special effects. However, the quality of the video image does not yet equal that of film, either in the veracity of color, the degree of resolution, or the illusion of depth. Film also benefits from the circumstances of viewing: in a dark room, there is no way to avoid looking but to close your eyes. With video or television, on the other hand, the viewer is surrounded by extraneous objects of daily existence.

FILM AS MEDIUM

Film has its own demands that have to be reconciled with the subject being treated. It is often necessary to balance the need to compare certain works with the way they will look on film. For example, it is hard to dissolve from a colorful painting to a pale drawing—the comparison one intends might concern the development of an idea or a theme, but the actual effect will be determined more by the contrast of the surface. This is not to say that it is impossible to compare paintings and drawings on film. One must, though, determine the method of best achieving one's aims, whether that means using a slow dissolve, a cut, or some other technique. The timing of dissolves, and the balance of dissolves and cuts, not only helps to make a point art historically and move the viewer from one image to the next; it also deeply affects the texture of the film as such. The filmmaker, therefore, is often balancing these three demands—and the final film needs to appear "seamless" (unless, of course, the filmmaker is consciously seeking a jarring effect).

Some filmmakers use "impressionistic" devices such as soft focus, tricky cuts, and unwarranted movement. These are often distracting and disturbing, as is arbitrary camera movement, with its gratuitous pans and zooms. I believe every camera move needs to be dictated by a clear intention, both in regard to the specific work, and to the shape of the scene as a whole. Each detail and each move reveals something about the work of art in question and is part of the texture and rhythm of the scene. There should be a good reason for moving the camera on a still image. Editing can help make a painting, sculpture,

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or drawing technique explicit through an analysis of detail, though too often details are used in merely anecdotal ways. It is also important to sense how long it takes the viewer to take something in, and to consider whether the addition of words or music will aid or hinder the overall film.

Films *can* help make works of art accessible—by placing them in a context, by providing comparative material, and by analyzing individual works. Art seen on television, without crowds, close up, without having to travel or wait in line, is by definition more accessible. But the viewer lacks the mutual reinforcement of waiting in line, hearing the views of others, and so on.[17] It is hoped that, once works of art seem less foreboding and more comprehensible, the television viewer will seek out original art objects and view them in a more enlightened manner. With video technology, viewers can now study art objects on film or video at their own pace; with the new interactive discs—an image storage system that can be accessed in various ways—they will be able to program their own course of study, using a film or TV program as a starting point. For example, while watching a film on representations of the body, the viewer could ask to see the range of Titian's Venus's, or look at what was happening in Northern Europe. One could call up a whole progression of Matisse nudes, while a single film may show only two or three.

Films on art are often more expensive to produce than other documentaries—they involve travel, location access, transparency rentals and permissions fees, and animation-camera set up. Corporations, foundations, and the National Endowments are therefore the principal underwriters of such films. But over the course of the past seven years, the National Endowment for the Humanities has funded only twelve productions on art, two of which were on architecture, and one of which was for children—this out of a total of 490 grants given in this period by the media section.[18] There is concern on the part of some of these underwriters that educational programming for prime-time broadcast will not draw a large enough audience. The implication is that learning and enjoyment are irreconcilable. But consider the success of *Nova, Living Planet,* and *Smithsonian World.* It is time to remedy the absence of programs on art.

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Many good films have, in fact, been made, but not all reach a sizable audience. In the United States, perhaps a hundred films or videos a year are produced that reach the public eye through television broadcast, major museum programs, or by receiving awards from the American Film Festival or CINE (Council on International Non-theatrical Events), both of which have a special category for films on art. Of all Public Broadcast Service (PBS) cultural programming, only 10 percent is in the fine arts. The U.S. has no national weekly program on the arts comparable to those that exist in Europe. The number of accessible films on art is meager, compared with the 1,463 books on art published last year in the United States.[19]

Soon, there may be more television programs on art. The J. Paul Getty Trust and the National Endowment for the Arts are currently funding several competitive pilots for a television series aimed at introducing art to children. WGBH in Boston and WNET in New York, two PBS stations, are developing series in art history; both are involved in a prolonged search for funding. The Program for Art on Film, a joint venture of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the J. Paul Getty Trust may soon begin funding short experimental films on art.

Television is the medium for educating the public about art. Unlike lectures or publications, films on art appeal to the senses directly. Paintings, beautifully filmed, can transport the viewer to an infinite number of locations and draw the viewer closer to the art object. As cultural programming, then, films on art, are both entertaining and educational. To strike a balance is the great challenge. With more experimentation, effective distribution, and sufficient funding, film and video could be a most powerful tool in the understanding of the fine arts and the development of visual literacy.

As Charles Eames used to say, we should "take our pleasure seriously."

ENDNOTES

[1]Rudolf Arnheim, *Visual Thinking* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969).

[2]I am grateful to Dr. Wendy Stein, program manager of the Program for Art on Film, a joint venture of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the J. Paul Getty

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Trust, for discussing this and many other issues with me and for providing estimates and information on various matters.

[3]Arnheim, op. cit.

[4]In a study published in 1977 by the Canadian Centre for Films on Art for the American Federation of the Arts, 2000 films on art were assembled out of which 450 were selected as particularly noteworthy. See *Films on Art: A Source Book Compiled and Edited by The Canadian Centre for Films on Art for The American Federation of Arts,* (New York: Watson-Guptill, 1977).

[5]This was basically the approach of Charles and Ray Eames.

[6]E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1960) presents this idea of "the beholder's share."

[7]Conversation with Michael Young, June 11, 1985.

[8]In addition, there are four Blackwood films in production. Di Antonio's "Painters' Painting" provide encounters with individual artists, critics, and dealers and the world they comprise. Perry Miller Adato's films on Georgia O'Keefe and Alice Neel, and Mildred Ackerman and Caroline Jones' recent film on Frank Stella at the Fogg Art Museum show the painters discussing their work to great advantage.

[9]There is a category harder to classify: works made by particularly fine filmmakers who have focused on art at some point in their career, such as Alain Resnais, Carlos Vilardebo, and Erwin Leiser.

[10]Roland Barthes, *Image—Music—Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 39.

[11]Barthes, op. cit., pp. 38–40.

[12]Bernard Nöel, "The Painting Lesson," typescript for a conference sponsored by the Institut National de l'Audiovisuel and The University of Pennsylvania, La Napoule, 1978.

[13]Conversation with Michael Young, June 11, 1985.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Rudolf Arnheim's *Film as Art* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), p. 129, provides an excellent analysis of how space and time are used in film. In a short summary of the formative means of filmic representation, Arnheim outlines how montage makes use of the absence of space-time continuum:

a) Showing beside (and among) one another, episodes that are separate in time, b) juxtaposition of places that are actually separate, c) presenting the characteristic features of a scene by showing selected portions of it, d) combination of things whose connection is not one of time and space but of meaning (symbolic) or shape, e) imperceptible montage illusion of altered . . . reality. . . . f) rhythm of the sequence of shots by "short" or "long" montage, etc.

[16]Another, newer technical advance that can increase flexibility in filming three-dimensional objects and on-location walking through museums, gardens, streets, and squares is the steadi-cam, a motion picture camera suspended from the camera operator's body on an armature with a system of weights and balances. These allow the camera to move around objects, to track along uneven ground, and to provide smooth panning shots without the cumbersomeness of laying down tracks and working from a dolly.

[17]Arnheim, *Film as Art*, op. cit., pp. 197–98.

[18]The National Endowment for the Arts does not have a list of grants for films *on* art as such.

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[19]The figure for art books published in the U.S. was provided by *Publishers Weekly*, which determined that 17,830 books on art have been published in the United States over the past ten years.

The British Film Institute gives a rough estimate of their card catalogue of films and video on art as 30,000. This number includes all productions since the start of film, as well as the various British and continental weekly television programs on the fine arts.

Those films and videotapes that are in distribution have relatively expensive rental fees, and one needs access to equipment for viewing. At the moment, many 16mm-film distributors are folding for lack of funds or interest on the part of educational institutions. There is hope, however, that distribution and accessibility will improve along with the new popularity of home video players and the growing videocassette market.

CINE averages that about 25 to 40 films a year are submitted to their competition. The number has been more or less constant for the past ten years. The American Film Festival had no figures on hand. Very few independent documentary films on art are broadcast here. European television, BBC, Antenne 2, German television in Cologne, RAI in Italy, all present more programs on the arts than does American television.

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Umberto Eco

Innovation and Repetition: Between Modern and Post-Modern Aesthetics

IT IS NOT BY CHANCE that modern aesthetics and modern theories of art (and I mean by "modern" those born with Mannerism, developed through Romanticism, and provocatively restated by the early-twentieth-century avant-gardes) have frequently identified the artistic message with metaphor. Metaphor (the new and inventive one, not the worn-out catachresis) is a way to designate something by the name of something else, thus presenting that something in an unexpected way. The modern criterion for recognizing the artistic value was *novelty,* high information. The pleasurable repetition of an already known pattern was considered, by modern theories of art, typical of Crafts—not of Art—and of industry.

A good craftsman, as well as an industrial factory, produces many *tokens,* or occurrences, of the same *type* or model. One appreciates the type, and appreciates the way the token meets the requirements of the type: but the modern aesthetics did not recognize such a procedure as an artistic one. That is why the Romantic aesthetics made such a careful distinction between "major" and "minor" arts, between arts and crafts. To make a parallel with sciences: crafts and industry were similar to the correct application of an already-known law to a new case. Art, on the contrary (and by art I mean also literature, poetry, movies, and so on) corresponded rather to a "scientific revolution": every work of modern art figures out a new law, imposes a *new paradigm,* a new way of looking at the world.

Modern aesthetics frequently forgot that the classical theory of art, from ancient Greece to the Middle Ages, was not so eager to stress a

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distinction between arts and crafts. The same term *(techne, ars)* was used to designate both the performance of a barber or a ship-builder, the work of a painter or a poet. The classical aesthetics was not so anxious for innovation at any cost: on the contrary, it frequently appreciated as "beautiful" the good tokens of an everlasting type. Even in those cases in which modern sensitivity enjoys the "revolution" performed by a classical artist, his contemporary enjoyed the opposite aspect of his work, that is, his respect for previous models.[1]

This is the reason why modern aesthetics was so severe apropos the industrial-like products of the mass media. A popular song, a TV commercial, a comic strip, a detective novel, a Western movie were seen as more or less successful tokens of a given model or type. As such they were judged as pleasurable but non-artistic. Furthermore, this excess of pleasurability, repetition, lack of innovation, was felt as a commercial trick (the product had to meet the expectations of its audience), not as the provocative proposal of a new (and difficult to accept) world vision. The products of mass media were equated with the products of industry insofar as they were produced *in series,* and the "serial" production was considered as alien to the artistic invention.

REDUNDANCE AND REPETITION IN THE MASS MEDIA

According to the modern aesthetics, the principal features of the mass-media products were repetition, iteration, obedience to a pre-established schema, and redundacy (as opposed to information).[2]

The device of *iteration* is typical, for instance, of television commercials: one distractedly watches the playing out of a sketch, then focuses one's attention on the punch line that reappears at the end of the episode. It is precisely on this foreseen and awaited reappearance that our modest but irrefutable pleasure is based.

Likewise, the reading of a traditional detective story presumes the enjoyment of a scheme. The scheme is so important that the most famous authors have founded their fortune on its very immutability.

Furthermore, the writer plays upon a continuous series of connotations (for example, the characteristics of the detective and of his immediate "entourage") to such an extent that their reappearance in each story is an essential condition of its reading pleasure. And so we have the by now historical "tics" of Sherlock Holmes, the punctilious

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vanity of Hercule Poirot, the pipe and the familiar fixes of Maigret, on up to the famous idiosyncracies of the most unabashed heroes of the hard-boiled novel. Vices, gestures, habits of the character portrayed permit us to recognize an old friend. These familiar features allow us to "enter into" the event. When our favorite author writes a story in which the usual characters do not appear, we are not even aware that the fundamental scheme of the story is still like the others: we read the book with a certain detachment and are immediately prone to judge it a "minor" one.

All this becomes very clear if we take a famous character such as Nero Wolfe, immortalized by Rex Stout. I shall review here the main characteristics of Nero Wolfe and his partners because it is important to ascertain how important they are for the reader of Stout's books. Nero Wolfe, from Montenegro, a naturalized American from time immemorial, is outlandishly fat, so much so that his leather easy chair must be expressly designed for him. He is fearfully lazy. In fact, he never leaves the house and depends for his investigations on the smart and brilliant Archie Goodwin, with whom he indulges in a continuous sharp and tense polemic, tempered somewhat by their mutual sense of humor. Nero Wolfe is an absolute glutton, and his cook, Fritz, is the vestal virgin in the pantry, devoted to the unending care of this highly cultivated palate and equally greedy stomach; but along with the pleasures of the table, Wolfe cultivates an all-absorbing and exclusive passion for orchids; he has a priceless collection in the greenhouse on the top floor of the villa where he lives. Quite possessed by gluttony and flowers, assailed by a series of accessory tics (love of scholarly literature, systematic misogyny, insatiable thirst for money), Nero Wolfe conducts his investigations, masterpieces of psychological penetration, sitting in his office, carefully weighing the information verbally furnished by Archie, studying the protagonists of each event who are obliged to visit him in his office, arguing with Inspector Cramer (attention: he always holds a methodically extinguished cigar in his mouth), quarreling with the odious Sergeant Purley Stebbins; and, finally, in a fixed setting from which he never veers, summoning the protagonists of the case to a meeting in his studio, usually in the evening. There, with skillful dialectical subterfuges, almost always before he himself knows the truth, he drives the guilty one into a public demonstration of hysteria by which he gives himself away.

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The gamut is much more ample: Archie's almost canonical arrest under suspicion of reticence and false testimony; the legal diatribes about the conditions on which Wolfe will take on a client; the hiring of part-time agents like Saul Panzer or Orrie Carther; the painting in the studio behind which Wolfe or Archie can watch, through a peephole, the behavior and reactions of a subject put to the test in the office itself; the scenes with Wolfe and an insincere client . . . . Such is the "eternal" story that the faithful reader enjoys in Stout's novels. To make it palatable, the author must invent every time a "new" crime and "new" secondary characters, but these details only serve to reconfirm the permanence of a fixed repertoire of *topoi.*

Not knowing who the guilty party is becomes an accessory element, almost a pretext. It is not a matter of discovering who committed the crime, but, rather, of following certain "topical" gestures of "topical" characters whose stock behavior we already love. The reader, little interested in the "new" psychological or economic motivations of the "new" crime, in fact enjoys those moments when Wolfe repeats his usual gestures, when he goes up for the nth time to take care of his orchids while the case itself is reaching its dramatic climax, when Inspector Cramer threateningly enters with one foot between the door and the wall, pushing aside Goodwin and warning Wolfe with a shake of his finger that this time things will not go so smoothly. The attraction of the book, the sense of repose, of psychological extension which it is capable of conferring, lies in the fact that, plopped in an easy chair or in the seat of a train compartment, the readers continuously recover, point by point, what they already know, and what they want to know again: that is why they have purchased the book. They derive pleasure from the non-story (if indeed a story is a development of events which should bring us from the point of departure to a point of arrival where we would never have dreamed of arriving); the distraction consists in the refutation of a development of events, in a withdrawal from the tension of past-present-future to the focus on an *instant,* which is loved precisely because it is recurrent.

It seems that mechanisms of this kind proliferate more widely in the popular narrative of today than in the eighteenth-century romantic *feuilleton,* where the event was founded upon a *development* and where the characters were required to march towards their death in the course of unexpected and "incredible" adventures.

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If this were true, it would be because the feuilleton, founded on the triumph of information, represented the preferred fare of a society that lived in the midst of messages loaded with redundancy; the sense of tradition, the norms of social life, moral principles, the rules of proper comportment in the framework of a bourgeois society designed a system of foreseeable messages that the social system provided for its members, and which allowed life to flow smoothly without unexpected jolts. In this sphere, the "informative" shock of a short story by Poe or the *coup de théâtre* of Ponson du Terrail provided the enjoyment of the "rupture." In a contemporary industrial society, instead, the social change, the continuous rise of new behavioral standards, the dissolution of tradition, require a narrative based upon redundancy. Redundant narrative structures would appear in this panorama as an indulgent invitation to repose, a chance of relaxing.

In fact, even the nineteenth-century novel was repetitive. Its fundamental patterns were always the same, and it was not so difficult, for a smart reader, to tell before the end of the story if Miss So-and-So was or was not the lost daughter of the duke of X. One can only say that the nineteenth-century feuilleton and contemporary mass media use *different* devices for making the expected appear unexpected. Archie Goodwin is explicitly expecting, with the readers, that Nero Wolfe will act in a certain way, while Eugène Sue pretended not to know in advance what her readers suspected, namely, that Fleur-de-Marie was the daughter of Rodolphe of Gerolstein. The formal principle does not change.

Perhaps one of the first inexhaustible characters during the decline of the feuilleton and bridging the two centuries at the close of *la belle époque* is Fantomas. Each episode of Fantomas closes with a kind of "unsucessful catharsis"; Juve and Fandor finally come to get their hands on the elusive one when he, with an unforeseeable move, foils the arrest. Another singular fact: Fantomas, responsible for blackmail and sensational kidnappings, at the beginning of each episode finds himself inexplicably poor and in need of money and, therefore, also of new "action." In this way the cycle is kept going.

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THE ERA OF REPETITION

I would like to consider now the case of an historical period (our own) for which iteration and repetition seem to dominate the whole world of artistic creativity, and in which it is difficult to distinguish between the repetition of the media and the repetition of the so-called major arts. In this period one is facing the discussion of a new theory of art, one that I would label *post-modern aesthetics*, which is revisiting the very concepts of repetition and iteration under a different profile. Recently in Italy such a debate has flourished under the standard of a "new aesthetics of seriality." I recommend my readers to take "seriality," in this case, as a very wide category or, if one wants, as another term for repetitive art.

Seriality and repetition are largely inflated concepts. The philosophy of the history of art has accustomed us to some technical meanings of these terms that it would be well to eliminate: I shall not speak of repetition in the sense of Kierkegaard, nor of "répétition différente," in the sense of Deleuze. In the history of contemporary music, series and seriality have been understood in a sense more or less opposite what we are discussing here. The dodecaphonic "series" is the opposite of the repetitive seriality typical of all the media, because there a given succession of twelve sounds is used once and only once within a single composition.

If you open a current dictionary, you will find that for "repeat" the meaning is "to say something or do something the second time or again and again; iteration of the same word, act or idea." For "series" the meaning is "a continued succession of similar things." It is a matter of establishing what it means to say "again" or "the same or similar things."

To serialize means, in some way, *to repeat*. Therefore, we shall have to define a first meaning of "to repeat" by which the term means to make a *replica* of the same *abstract type*. Two sheets of typewriter paper are both *replicas* of the same commercial *type*. In this sense one thing is the same as another when the former exhibits the same properties as the latter, at least under a certain description: two sheets of typing paper are the same from the point of view of our functional needs, even though they are not the same for a physicist interested in the molecular structure of the objects. From the point of view of industrial mass production, two "tokens" can be considered as

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"replicas" of the same "type" when for a normal person with normal requirements, in the absence of evident imperfection, it is irrelevant whether one chooses one instead of the other. Two copies of a film or of a book are replicas of the same type.

The repetitiveness and the seriality that interests us here look instead at something that at first glance does not appear the same as (equal to) something else.

Let us now see the case in which (1) something is offered as original and different (according to the requirements of modern aesthetics); (2) we are aware that this something is repeating something else that we already know; and (3) notwithstanding this—better, just because of it—we like it (and we buy it).

The Retake

The first type of repetition is the *retake*. In this case one recycles the characters of a previous successful story in order to exploit them, by telling what happened to them after the end of their first adventure. The most famous example of retake is Dumas's *Twenty Years Later,* the most recent ones are the "to be continued" versions of *Star Wars* or *Superman*. The retake is dependent on a commercial decision. There is no rule establishing whether the second episode of the story should reproduce, with only slight variations, the first one, or must be a totally different story concerning the same characters. The retake is not strictly condemned to repetition. An illustrious example of retake are the many different stories of the Arthurian cycle, telling again and again the vicissitudes of Lancelot or Perceval.

The Remake

The *remake* consists in telling again a previous successful story. See the innumerable editions of *Dr. Jekyll* or of *Mutiny on the Bounty*. The history of arts and literature is full of pseudo-remakes that were able to tell at every time something different. The whole of Shakespeare is a remake of preceding stories. Therefore "interesting" remakes can escape repetition.

The Series

The *series* works upon a fixed situation and a restricted number of fixed pivotal characters, around whom the secondary and changing ones turn. The secondary characters must give the impression that the

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new story is different from the preceding ones, while in fact the narrative scheme does not change. I have said something above on the scheme of the novels by Rex Stout.

To the same type belong the TV serials such as *All in the Family, Starsky and Hutch, Columbo,* etc. (I put together different TV genres that range from soap opera to situation comedy, and to the detective serial).

With a series one believes one is enjoying the novelty of the story (which is always the same) while in fact one is enjoying it because of the recurrence of a narrative scheme that remains constant. The series in this sense responds to the infantile need of hearing again always the same story, of being consoled by the "return of the Identical," superficially disguised.

The series consoles us (the consumers) because it rewards our ability to foresee: we are happy because we discover our own ability to guess what will happen. We are satisfied because we find again what we had expected, but we do not attribute this happy result to the obviousness of the narrative structure, but to our own presumed capacities to make forecasts. We do not think, "The author has constructed the story in a way that I could guess the end," but rather, "I was so smart to guess the end in spite of the efforts the author made to deceive me."

We find a variation of the series in the structure of the flashback: we see, for example, some comic-strip stories (such as Superman) in which the character is not followed along in a straight line during the course of his life, but is continually rediscovered at different moments of his life, obsessively revisited in order to discover there new opportunities for new narratives. It seems as if these moments of his life have fled from the narrator out of absent-mindedness, but their rediscovery does not change the psychological profile of the character, which is fixed already, once and for all. In topological terms this sub-type of the series may be defined as a *loop*.

Usually the loop-series comes to be devised for commercial reasons: it is a matter of considering how to keep the series alive, of obviating the natural problem of the aging of the character. Instead of having characters put up with new adventures (that would imply their inexorable march toward death), they are made continually to relive their past. The loop solution produces paradoxes that were already the target of innumerable parodies. Characters have a little

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future but an enormous past, and in any case, nothing of their past will ever have to change the mythological present in which they have been presented to the reader from the beginning. Ten different lives would not suffice to make Little Orphan Annie undergo what she underwent in the first (and only) ten years of her life.

The spiral is another variation of the series. In the stories of Charlie Brown, apparently nothing happens, and any character is obsessively repeating his/her standard performance. And yet in every strip the character of Charlie Brown or Snoopy is enriched and deepened. This does not happen either with Nero Wolfe, or Starsky or Hutch: we are always interested in their new adventures, but we already know all we need to know about their psychology, their habits, their capacities, their ethical standpoints.

I would add finally that form of seriality that, in cinema and television, is motivated less by the narrative structure than by the nature of the actor himself: the mere presence of John Wayne, or of Jerry Lewis (when they are not directed by a great director, and even in these cases) succeeds in making, always, the *same* film. The author tries to invent different stories, but the public recognizes (with satisfaction) always and ever the same story, under superficial disguises.

The Saga

The *saga* differs from the series insofar as it concerns the story of a family and is interested in the "historical" lapse of time. It is genealogical. In the saga, the actors do age; the saga is a history of the aging of individuals, families, people, groups.

The saga can have a continuous lineage (the character is followed from birth to death; the same is then done for his son, his grandson, and so on, potentially forever), or it can be tree-like (there is a patriarch, then the various narrative branches that concern not only his direct descendents, but also the collateral lines and the kin, each branch branching out infinitely). The most familiar (and recent) instance of saga is certainly *Dallas*.

The saga is a series in disguise. It differs from the series in that the characters change (they change also because the actors age). But in reality the saga repeats, in spite of its historicized form, celebrating in appearance the passage of time, the same story. As with ancient sagas, the deeds of the gallant ancestors are the same as the deeds of

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their descendents. In *Dallas,* grandfathers and grandsons undergo more or less the same ordeals: struggle for wealth and for power, life, death, defeat, victory, adultery, love, hate, envy, illusion, and delusion.

Intertextual Dialogue

I mean by intertextual dialogue the phenomenon by which a given text echoes previous texts. Many forms of intertextuality are outside my present concerns. I am not interested, for example, in stylistic quotation, in those cases in which a text quotes, in a more or less explicit way, a stylistic feature, a way of narrating typical of another author—either as a form of parody or in order to pay homage to a great and acknowledged master. There are imperceptible quotations, of which not even the author is aware, that are the normal effect of the game of artistic influence. There are also quotations of which the author is aware but that should remain ungraspable by the consumer; in these cases we are usually in the presence of a banal work and plagiarism.

What is more interesting is when the quotation is explicit and recognizable, as happens in literature or post-modern art, which blatantly and ironically play on intertextuality (novel on the techniques of the narrative, poetry on poetry, art on art).

There is a procedure typical of the post-modern narrative that has been much used recently in the field of mass communications: it concerns the ironic quotation of the commonplace *(topos).* Let us remember the killing of the Arab giant in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and the staircase of Odessa in Woody Allen's *Bananas.* What joins these two quotations? In both cases, the spectator, in order to enjoy the allusion, must know the original *topoi.* In the case of the giant, it is a situation typical of the genre; in the case of *Bananas*—on the contrary—the topos appears for the first and only time in a single work, and only after that quotation the topos becomes a shibboleth for movie critics and moviegoers.

In both cases the topoi are recorded by the "encyclopedia" of the spectator; they make up a part of the treasury of the collective imagination and as such they come to be called upon. What differentiates the two quotations is the fact that the topos in *Raiders* is quoted in order to contradict it (what we expect to happen, based on our experience, will not), while in *Bananas* the topos is introduced

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only because of its incongruity (the staircase has nothing to do with the rest of the story).

The first case recalls the series of cartoons that was published years ago by *Mad,* under the heading "a film which we would like to see." For example, the heroine, in the West, tied by bandits to the railroad tracks: the alternating shots show on one side the approaching train and on the other the furious cavalcade of rescuers trying to arrive ahead of the locomotive. In the end, the girl (contrary to all the expectations suggested by the topos evoked) is crushed by the train. Here we are faced with a comic ploy which exploits the presupposition (correct) that the public will recognize the original topos, will apply to the quotation the "normal" system of expectations (I mean the expectations that this piece of encyclopedical information is supposed to elicit), and will then enjoy the way in which its expectations are frustrated. At this point the ingenuous spectator, at first frustrated, overcomes his frustration and transforms himself into a critical spectator who appreciates the way in which he was tricked.

In the case of *Bananas,* however, we are at a different level: the spectator with whom the text establishes an implicit agreement (tongue-in-cheek) is not the ingenuous spectator (who can be struck at most by the apparition of an incongruous event) but the critical spectator who appreciates the ironic ploy of the quotation and enjoys its desired incongruity. However, in both cases we have a critical side-effect: aware of the quotation, the spectator is brought to elaborate ironically on the nature of such a device and to acknowledge the fact that he has been invited to play upon his encyclopedic competence.

The game becomes complicated in the "retake" of *Raiders,* that is, in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom:* here the hero encounters not one but two giant enemies. In the first case, we are expecting that, according to the classical schemes of the adventure film, the hero will be disarmed, and we laugh when we discover that instead the hero has a pistol and easily kills his adversary. In the second case, the director knows that the spectators (having already seen the preceding film), will expect the hero to be armed, and indeed, Indiana Jones quickly looks for his pistol. He does not find it, and the spectators laugh because the expectation created by the first film is this time frustrated.

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The cases cited put into play an intertextual encyclopedia. We have texts that are quoted from other texts and the knowledge of the preceding ones—taken for granted—is supposed to be necessary for the enjoyment of the new one.

More interesting for the analysis of the new intertextuality in the media is the example of *E.T.*, in the scene where the creature from outer space (an invention of Spielberg) is led into a city during Halloween and encounters another personage, disguised as the gnome in *The Empire Strikes Back* (an invention of Lucas). E.T. is jolted and seeks to hurl himself upon the gnome in order to embrace him, as if he had met an old friend. Here the spectators must know many things: they must certainly know of the existence of another film (intertextual knowledge), but they must also know that both monsters were created by Rambaldi, that the directors of the two films are linked together for various reasons (not least because they are the two most successful directors of the decade); they must, in short, have not only a knowledge of the texts but also a knowledge of the world, circumstances external to the texts. One notices, naturally, that knowledge of the texts and the world are only two possible chapters of encyclopedic knowledge, and that therefore, in a certain measure, the text always makes reference to the same cultural patrimony.

Such phenomena of "intertextual dialogue" were once typical of experimental art, and presupposed a Model Reader, culturally very sophisticated.[3] The fact that similar devices have now become more common in the media world leads us to see that the media are carrying on—and presupposing—the possession of pieces of information already conveyed by other media.

The text of *E.T.* "knows" that the public has learned, from newspapers or from television, everything about Rambaldi, Lucas, and Spielberg. The media seem, in this play of extratextual quotation, to make reference to the world, but in effect they are referring to the contents of other messages sent by other media. The game is played, so to speak, on a "broadened" intertextuality. Any difference between knowledge of the world (understood naively as a knowledge derived from an extratextual experience) and intertextual knowledge has practically vanished. Our reflections to come, then, must not only question the phenomenon of repetition within a single work or a series of works, but all the phenomena that make various strategies of

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repetition producible, understandable, and commercially possible. In other words, repetition and seriality in the media pose new problems for the sociology of culture.

Another form of intertextuality is the genre-embedding that today is very common in the mass media. For example, every Broadway musical (in the theater or on film) is, as a rule, nothing other than the story of how a Broadway musical is put on. The Broadway genre seems to require (postulate) a vast intertextual knowledge: in fact, it creates and institutes the required competence and the presuppositions indispensable to its understanding. Every one of these films or plays tells how a Broadway musical is put on, and furnishes us, in effect, with all the information about the genre it belongs to. The spectacle gives the public the sensation of knowing ahead of time that which it does not yet know and will know only at the moment. We stand facing the case of a colossal preterition (or "passing over"). In this sense, the musical is a didactic work that takes account of the (idealized) rules of its own production.

Finally, we have the work that speaks of itself: not the work that speaks of a genre to which it belongs, but a work that speaks of its own structure, and of the way in which it was made. Critics and aestheticians were inclined to think that this device was an exclusive feature of the works of the avant-garde and alien to mass communications. Aesthetics knows this problem and indeed gave it a name long ago: it is the Hegelian problem of the Death of Art. But in these later times there have been cases of productions in the mass media capable of self-irony, and some of the examples mentioned above seem to me of great interest. Even here the line between "high-brow" arts and "low-brow" arts seems to have become very thin.

A MODERATED OR "MODERN" AESTHETIC SOLUTION

Let us now try to review the phenomena listed above from the point of view of a "modern" conception of aesthetic value, according to which every work aesthetically "well done" is endowed with two characteristics:

(1) It must achieve a dialectic between order and novelty—in other words, between scheme and innovation;

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(2) This dialectic must be perceived by the consumer, who must not only grasp the contents of the message, but also the way in which the message transmits those contents.

This being the case, nothing prevents the types of repetition listed above from achieving the conditions necessary to the realization of aesthetic value, and the history of the arts is ready to furnish us with satisfactory examples for each of the types in our classification.

Retake. Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* is nothing else but a retake of Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato,* and precisely because of the success of the first, which was in its turn a retake of the themes of the Breton cycle. Boiardo and Ariosto added a goodly amount of irony into material that was very "serious" and "taken seriously" by previous readers. But even the third Superman is ironical in regard to the first (mystical and very, very serious). It appears as the retake of an archetype inspired by the gospel, made by winking at the films of Frank Tashlin.

Remake. I have already suggested that Shakespeare remade a lot of very well-known stories of the previous centuries.

Series. Every text presupposes and constructs always a double Model Reader (let us say, a naive and a "smart" one). The former uses the work as semantic machinery and is the victim of the strategies of the author who will lead him little by little along a series of previsions and expectations; the latter evaluates the work as an aesthetic product and enjoys the strategies implemented in order to produce a model reader of the first level. This second-level reader is the one who enjoys the seriality of the series, not so much for the return of the same thing (that the ingenuous reader believed was different) but for the strategy of the variations; in other words, he enjoys the way in which the same story is worked over to appear to be different.

This enjoyment of variations is obviously encouraged by the more sophisticated series. Indeed, we can classify the products of serial narratives along a continuum that takes into account the different gradations of the reading agreement between the text and the "smart" reader (as opposed to the naive one). It is evident that even the most banal narrative product allows the reader to become, by an autonomous decision, a critical reader, able to recognize the innova-

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tive strategies (if any). But there are serial works that establish an explicit agreement with the critical reader and thus, so to speak, challenge him to acknowledge the innovative aspects of the text.

Belonging to this category are the television films of Lieutenant Columbo. It is worth noticing that in this series the authors spell out from the beginning who the murderer is. The spectator is not so much invited to play the naive game of guessing (whodunit?) as (1) to enjoy Columbo's detection technique, appreciated as an encore to a well-known piece of bravura (and in this sense the pleasure provided by Columbo is not so different from the one provided by Nero Wolfe); and (2) to discover in what way the author will succeed in winning his bet, which consists in having Columbo do what he always does, but nevertheless in a way that is not banally repetitive. Every story of Nero Wolfe was written by Rex Stout, but every episode of Columbo is directed by a different person. The critical addressee is invited to pronounce a judgment on the best variation.

I use the term "variation" thinking of the classical musical variations. They, too, were "serial products" that aimed very little at the naive addressee and that bet everything on an agreement with the critical one. The composer was fundamentally interested only in the applause of the critical listener, who was supposed to appreciate the fantasy displayed in his innovations on an old theme.

In this sense, seriality and repetition are not opposed to innovation. Nothing is more "serial" than a tie pattern, and yet nothing can be so personalized as a tie. The example may be elementary, but that does not make it banal. Between the elementary aesthetics of the tie and the recognized "high" artistic value of the Goldberg Variations, there is a gradated continuum of repetitious strategies, aimed at the response of the "smart" addressee.

The problem is that there is not, on the one hand, an aesthetics of "high" art (original and not serial), and on the other a pure sociology of the serial. Rather, there is an aesthetics of serial forms that requires an historical and anthropological study of the ways in which, at different times and in different places, the dialectic between repetition and innovation has been instantiated. When we fail to find innovation in the serial, this is perhaps less a result of the structures of the text, than of our "horizon of expectations" and our cultural habits. We know very well that in certain examples of non-Western art, where we always see the same thing, the natives recognize infinites-

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imal variations and feel the shiver of innovation. Where we see innovation, at least in the serial forms of the Western past, the original addressees were not at all interested in that aspect and conversely enjoyed the recurrences of the scheme.

Saga. The entire *Human Comedy* by Balzac presents a very good example of a tree-like saga, as much as *Dallas* does. Balzac is more interesting than *Dallas* because every one of his novels increases our knowledge of the society of his time, while every program of *Dallas* tells us the *same* thing about American society—but both use the same narrative scheme.

Intertextuality. The notion of intertextuality itself has been elaborated within the framework of a reflection on "high" art. Notwithstanding, the examples given above have been taken up provocatively by the world of mass communication in order to show how even these forms of intertextual dialogue have by now been transferred to the field of popular production.

It is typical of what is called post-modern literature and art (but did it not already happen thus with the music of Stravinsky?) to quote by using (sometimes under various stylistic disguises) *quotation marks* so that the reader pays no attention to the content of the citation but instead to the way in which the excerpt from a first text is introduced into the fabric of a second one. Renato Barilli has observed that one of the risks of this procedure is the failure to make the quotation marks evident, so that what is cited is accepted by the naive reader as an original invention rather than as an ironic reference.[5]

We have so far put forward three examples of quotations of a previous topos: *Raiders of the Lost Ark, Bananas,* and *E.T.* Let us look closer at the third case: the spectator who knows nothing of the production of two films (in which one quotes from the other) cannot succeed in understanding why what happens does happen. By that gag, the movie focuses both upon movies and upon the media-universe. The understanding of this device is a condition for its aesthetic enjoyment. Thus, this episode can work only if one realizes that there are quotation marks somewhere. One can say that these marks can be perceived only on the basis of an extratextual knowledge. Nothing *in the film* helps the spectator to understand at what point there ought to be quotation marks. The film presupposes a previous world-knowledge on the part of the spectator. And if the

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spectator does not know? Too bad. The effect gets lost, but the film knows of other means to gain approval.

These imperceptible quotation marks, more than an aesthetic device, are a social artifice; they select the happy few (and the mass media usually hopes to produce millions of happy few . . . .) To the naive spectator of the first level, the film has already given almost too much: that secret pleasure is reserved, for that time, for the critical spectator of the second level.

The case of *Raiders* is different. Here, if the critical spectator fails—does not recognize the quotation—there remain plenty of possibilities for the naive spectator, who at least can always enjoy the fact that the hero gets the best of his adversary. We are here confronted by a less subtle strategy than in the preceding example, a mode inclined to satisfy the urgent need of the producer, who in any case must sell his product to whomever he can. While it is difficult to imagine *Raiders* being seen and enjoyed by those spectators who do not grasp the interplay of quotations, it is always possible that this will happen, and the work is clearly open even to this possibility.

I do not feel like saying which, between the two texts cited, pursues the "more aesthetically noble" ends. It is enough for me (and perhaps for the moment I have already given myself much to think about) to point out a (critically relevant) difference in the functioning and use of textual strategy.

We come now to the case of *Bananas*. On that staircase there descend, not only a baby carriage, but also a platoon of rabbis and I do not remember what else. What happens to the spectator who has not caught the quotation from the *Potemkin* mixed up with imprecise fancies about the *Fiddler on the Roof?* I believe that because of the orgiastic energy with which the scene—the staircase with its incongruous population—is presented, even the most naive spectator may grasp the symphonic turbulence of this Brueghel-like kermis. Even the most ingenuous among the spectators "feels" a rhythm, an invention, and cannot help but fix his attention on the way it is put together.

At the extreme other end of the pole of the aesthetic interests, I would like to mention a work whose equivalent I have not succeeded in finding in the contemporary mass media; it is not only a masterpiece of intertextuality but also a paramount example of narrative

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metalanguage, which speaks of its own formation and of the rules of the narrative genre: I refer to *Tristram Shandy*.

It is impossible to read and enjoy Sterne's anti-novel novel without realizing that it is treating the novel form ironically. *Tristram Shandy* is so aware of its nature that it is impossible to find there a single ironical statement that does not make evident its own quotation marks. It brings to a high artistic resolution the rhetorical device called *pronuntiatio* (that is, the way of stressing imperceptibly the irony).

I believe that I have singled out a typology of "quotation marking" that must in some way be relevant to the ends of a phenomenology of aesthetic value, and of the pleasure that follows from it. I believe further that the strategies for matching surprise and novelty with repetition, even if they are semiotic devices in themselves aesthetically neutral, can give place to different results on the aesthetic level.

Some conclusions follow:

Each of the types of repetition that we have examined is not limited to the mass media, but belongs by right to the entire history of artistic creativity: plagiarism, quotation, parody, the ironic retake, the intertextual joke, are typical of the entire artistic-literary tradition.

Much art has been and is repetitive. The concept of absolute originality is a contemporary one, born with Romanticism; classical art was in vast measure serial, and the "modern" avant-garde (at the beginning of this century) challenged the Romantic idea of "creation from nothingness," with its techniques of collage, mustachios on the Mona Lisa, art about art, and so on.

The same type of repetitive procedure can produce either excellence or banality; it can put the addressees into conflict with themselves and with the intertextual tradition as a whole; thus it can provide them with easy consolations, projections, identifications: it can establish an agreement exclusively with the naive addressee, or exclusively with the smart one, or with both at different levels and along a continuum of solutions that cannot be reduced to a rudimentary typology.

Nevertheless, a typology of repetition does not furnish the criteria that can establish differences in aesthetic values.

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Yet, since the various types of repetition are present in the whole of artistic and literary history, they can be taken into account in order to establish criteria of artistic value. An aesthetics of repetition requires as a premise a semiotics of the textual procedures of repetition.

A RADICAL OR "POST-MODERN" AESTHETIC SOLUTION

I realize that all I have said until now still represents an attempt to reconsider the various forms of repetition in the media in terms of the "modern" dialectic between order and innovation. The fact, however, is that when one speaks today of the aesthetics of seriality, one alludes to something more radical, that is, to a notion of aesthetic value that wholly escapes the "modern" idea of art and literature.[5]

It has been observed that with the phenomenon of television serials we find a new concept of "the infinity of the text"; the text takes on the rhythms of that same dailiness in which it is produced, and that it mirrors. The problem is not one of recognizing that the serial text varies indefinitely upon a basic scheme (and in this sense it can be judged from the point of view of the "modern" aesthetics). The real problem is that what is of interest is not so much the single variations as "variability" as a formal principle, the fact that one can make variations to infinity. Variability to infinity has all the characteristics of repetition, and very little of innovation. But it is the "infinity" of the process that gives a new sense to the device of variation. What must be enjoyed—suggests the post-modern aesthetics—is the fact that a series of possible variations is potentially infinite. What becomes celebrated here is a sort of victory of life over art, with the paradoxical result that the era of electronics—instead of emphasizing the phenomena of shock, interruptions, novelty, and frustration of expectations—would produce a return to the continuum, the Cyclical, the Periodical, the Regular.

Omar Calabrese has thoroughly looked into this:[6] from the point of view of the "modern" dialectic between repetition and innovation, one can easily recognize how in the Columbo series, for example, on a basic scheme some of the best names in American cinema have worked in variations. Thus it would be difficult to speak, in such a case, of pure repetition: if the scheme of the detection and the psychology of the protagonist actor remains unchanged, the style of the narrative changes each time. This is no small thing, especially

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from the point of view of the "modern" aesthetics. But it is exactly on a different idea of style that Calabrese's paper is centered. In these forms of repetition "we are not so much interested in what is repeated as we are in the way the components of the text come to be segmented and then how the segments come to be codified in order to establish a system of invariants: any component that does not belong to the system, can be defined as an *independent variable*." In the most typical and apparently "degenerated" cases of seriality, the independent variables are not altogether the more visible, but the more microscopic, as in a homeopathic solution where the potion is all the more potent because by further "succussions" the original particles of the medicinal product have almost disappeared. This is what permits Calabrese to speak of the Columbo series as an "exercice de style" à la Queneau. We are, says Calabrese, facing a "neobaroque aesthetics" that is instantiated, not only by the "cultivated" products, but even, and above all, by those that are most degenerated. Apropos of *Dallas*, one can say that "the semantic opposition and the articulation of the elementary narrative structures can migrate in combinations of the highest improbability around the various characters."

Organized differentiations, polycentrism, regulated irregularity—such would be the fundamental aspects of this neo-baroque aesthetic, the principal example of which is musical variations à la Bach. Since in the epoch of mass communications "the condition for listening . . . it is that for which all has already been said and already been written . . . as in the Kabuki theater, it may then be the most minuscule variant that will produce pleasure in the text, or that form of explicit repetition which is already known."

What results from these reflections is clear. The focus of the theoretical inquiry is displaced. Before, mass mediologists tried to save the dignity of repetition by recognizing in it the possibility of a traditional dialectic between scheme and innovation (but it was still the innovation that accounted for the value, the way of rescuing the product from degradation and promoting it to a value). Now, the emphasis must be placed on the inseparable knot of scheme-variation, where the variation is no longer more appreciable than the scheme. The term neobaroque must not deceive: we are witnessing the birth of a new aesthetic sensibility much more archaic, and truly post-post-modern.

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As Giovanna Grignaffini observes, "the neobaroque aesthetics has transformed a commercial constraint into a 'formal principle.' " As a result, "any idea of unicity becomes destroyed to its very roots."[7] As happened with Baroque music, and as (according to Walter Benjamin) happens in our era of "technological reproduction," the messages of mass media can and must be received and understood in a "state of inattention."

It goes without saying that the authors I have quoted see very clearly how much commercial and "gastronomical" consolation there is in putting forward stories that always say the same thing and in a circular way always close in on themselves. But they do not only apply to such products a rigidly formalistic criterion, but also suggest that we ought to conceive of a new audience that feels perfectly comfortable with such a criterion. Only by presupposing such agreement can one speak of a new aesthetics of the serial. And only by such an agreement is the serial no longer the poor relative of the arts, but the form of art that can satisfy the new aesthetic sensibility, indeed, the post-post-modern Greek tragedy.

We would not be scandalized if such criteria were to be applied (as they have been applied) to abstract art. And in fact, here we are about to outline a new aesthetics of the "abstract" applied to the products of mass communication.

But this requires that the naive addressee of the first level will disappear, giving place only to the critical reader of the second level. In fact, there is no conceivable naive addressee of an abstract painting or sculpture. If there is one who—in front of them—asks, "But what does it mean?" this is not an addressee of either the first or second level; he is excluded from any artistic experience whatever. Of abstract works there is only a critical "reading": what is formed is of no interest, only the way it is formed is interesting.

Can we expect the same for the serial products of television? What should we think about the birth of a new public that, indifferent to the stories told (which are in any case already known), only relishes the repetition and its own microscopic variations? In spite of the fact that today the spectator still weeps in the face of the Texan families' tribulations, ought we to expect in the near future a true and real genetic mutation?

If it should not happen this way, the radical proposal of the post-modern aesthetics would appear singularly snobby: as in a sort

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of neo-Orwellian world, the pleasures of the smart reading would be reserved for the members of the Party and the pleasures of the naive reading reserved for the proletarians. The entire industry of the serial would exist, as in the world of Mallarmé (made to end in a Book), with its only aim being to furnish neo-baroque pleasure to the happy few, reserving pity and fear to the unhappy many who remain.

SOME QUESTIONS IN THE GUISE OF CONCLUSIONS

According to this hypothesis we should think of a universe of new consumers disinterested in what really happens to J.R., and bent on grasping the neo-baroque pleasure provided by the form of his adventures. However, one could ask if such an outlook (even though warranting a *new* aesthetics) can be agreed to by an *old* semiotics.

Baroque music, as well as abstract art, is "a-semantic." One can discuss, and I am the first to do so, whether it is possible to discriminate so straightforwardly between purely "syntactic" and "semantic" arts. But may we at least recognize that there are figurative arts and abstract arts? Baroque music and abstract painting are not figurative; television serials are.

Until what point shall we be able to enjoy as merely musical those variations that play upon "likenesses"? Can one escape from the fascination of the possible worlds that these "likenesses" outline?

Perhaps we are obliged to try a different hypothesis.

We can say then that the neo-baroque series brings to its first level of fruition (impossible to eliminate) the pure and simple myth. Myth has nothing to do with art. It is a story, always the same. It may not be the story of Atreus and it may be that of J.R. Why not? Every epoch has its myth-makers, its own sense of the sacred. Let us take for granted such a "figurative" representation and such an "orgiastic" enjoyment of the myth. Let us take for granted the intense emotional participation, the pleasure of the reiteration of a single and constant truth, and the tears, and the laughter—and finally the *catharsis*. Then we can conceive of an audience also able to shift onto an aesthetic level and to judge the art of the variations on a mythical theme—in the same way as one succeeds in appreciating a "beautiful funeral" even when the deceased was a dear person.

Are we sure that the same thing did not happen even with the classical tragedy?

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If we re-read Aristotle's *Poetics* we see that it was possible to describe the model of a Greek tragedy as a *serial* one. From the quotations of the Stagirite we realize that the tragedies of which he had knowledge were many more than have come down to us, and they all followed (by varying it) one fixed scheme. We can suppose that those that have been saved were those that corresponded better to the canons of the ancient aesthetic sensibility. But we could also suppose that the decimation came about on the basis of political-cultural criteria, and no one can forbid us from imagining that Sophocles may have survived by virtue of a political maneuver, by sacrificing better authors (but "better" according to what criteria?).

If there were many more tragedies than those we know, and if they all followed (with variations) a fixed scheme, what would happen if today we were able to see them and read them all together? Would our evaluations of the originality of Sophocles or Aeschylus be different from what they are currently? Would we find in these authors variations on topical themes where today we see indistinctly a unique (and sublime) way of confronting the problems of the human condition? Perhaps where we see absolute invention, the Greeks would have seen only the "correct" variation on a single scheme, and sublime appeared to them, not the single work, but precisely the scheme. It is not by chance that, when speaking of the art of poetry, Aristotle dealt mainly with schemes before all else, and mentioned single works only for the sake of an example.

Since at this point I am playing what Peirce called "the play of musement" and I am multiplying the hypotheses—in order to find out, maybe later, a single fruitful idea—let us now reverse our experiment and look at a contemporary TV serial from the point of view of a future neo-romantic aesthetics which, supposedly, has assumed again that "originality is beautiful." Let us imagine a society in the year 3000 A.D., in which 90 percent of all our present cultural production had been destroyed and of all our television serials only *one* show of lieutenant Columbo had survived.

How would we "read" this work? Would we be moved by such an original picture of a little man in the struggle with the powers of evil, with the forces of capital, with an opulent and racist society dominated by WASPs? Would we appreciate this efficient, concise, and intense representation of the urban landscape of an industrial America?

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When—in a single piece of a series—something is simply *presupposed* by the audience, which knows the whole series, would we speak perhaps of an art of synthesis of a sublime capacity of telling through essential allusions?

In other words, how would we read a "piece" of a series, if the whole of the series remained unknown to us?

Such a series of questions could continue indefinitely. I started to put them forth because I think that we still know very little about the role of repetition in the universe of art and in the universe of mass media.

ENDNOTES

[1]On the opposition between innovation and repetition, see my works *Opera aperta* (Milan: Bompiani, 1962) and *Apocalittici e Integrati* (Milan: Bompiani, 1964). Partial English translations appear in *The Role of the Reader* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1979).

[2]I repeat here some of my old remarks in "The Myth of Superman" (1962), now in *The Role of the Reader,* op. cit.

[3]Cf., for the idea of "the model reader," my *The Role of the Reader,* op. cit.

[4]"Dal leggibile all'illegibile," in Luigi Russo, ed., *Letteratura tra consumo e ricerca* (Bologna: Mulino, 1984).

[5]The "manifesto" of this new aesthetics of seriality is the special issue of the journal *Cinema & Cinema* 35–36, 1983, pp. 20–24.

[6]"I replicanti," *Cinema & Cinema,* op. cit., pp. 25–39.

[7]"J.R.: vi presento il racconto," *Cinema & Cinema,* op. cit., pp. 46–51.

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Jonathan Miller

The Mind's Eye and the Human Eye

Anything that relieves reponsible prose of the duty of being, while placed before us, good enough, interesting enough and, if the question be of picture, pictorial enough, above all in itself, does it the worst of services, and may well inspire in the lover of literature certain lively questions as to the future of that institution.

—Henry James,
Preface to *The Golden Bowl*

IT IS DIFFICULT TO DECIDE whether Henry James actually approved of the illustrations his publisher persuaded him to accept for the complete edition of his works. As the creator of figures and scenes which "are as nought from the moment they fail to become visible appearances," he was reassured "to see such powers as he possessed approved and registered by the springing of such fruit from his seed." At the same time, he regarded illustration as a dangerously competitive process, and as the author of a text "putting forward illustrative claims by its own intrinsic virtue," he was reluctant to share the responsibility for reducing his reader to a state of hallucination with an illustrator. He accepted pictures therefore on the understanding "that they would be expressions of no particular thing in the text," and since he ruled out any attempt to keep dramatic step with the events represented in the text, the illustrations were to remain "at most small pictures of our set stage with the actors left out."

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With the invention of cinematography, it is no longer possible for a novelist to secure an agreement of this sort. It would be nonsensical to "leave the actors out" of a film, and the idea of a movie that failed to keep some sort of dramatic step with its suggested matter is a contradiction in terms. Instead of supplementing the text, moving pictures threaten to replace it altogether, and unless the author forbids the adaptation of his own work, the best he can hope for is the right to veto anything that gets it wrong. But this, of course, is not the point at issue. When James objected to illustration, it was not because he thought that the artist would get it wrong, but because he recognized that there was no conceivable way a pictorial representation could "get it right." Apart from the fact that language can express meanings that are inexpressible in any other medium, there is an important sense in which even its visual effects are distinctive. That is to say, leaving aside the peculiar resources of tense, metaphor, irony, and indirect speech, for which, as I hope to show, there are no conceivable counterparts in illustration, the experience of *visualizing* something as the result of reading a *description* of it is altogether different from *seeing* it in the form of an actual picture.

Unfortunately, this distinction is not always given the credit it deserves. On the contrary, we consistently blur it by thinking of the imagination as if it were a display of internal pictures. So that, as Gilbert Ryle points out, when someone says that he is visualizing something—his nursery, say—"we are tempted to construe his remark to mean that he is somehow contemplating not his nursery, but another visible object, namely a picture of his nursery, only not a photograph or an oil painting, but some counterpart to a photograph, one made of a different sort of stuff." The reason why we think like this is as follows. The verb to *see* is transitive, which is another way of saying that we cannot *see* without seeing *something*. We *see* our nursery, say, or Helvellyn, and as long as the nursery or Helvellyn are out there to *be* seen there is no difficulty. But when we *visualize* something (or, as we say, "see" it), there is of course nothing out there to intercept our gaze. But since we assume that "seeing" in quotes has the same transitive (accusative) requirements as *seeing* without them, we find ourselves stipulating the existence of a substitute, something that resembles the absent object without actually being it; hence *mental* pictures, seen not by the real eye, but by the mind's eye.

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The invention of movies and televison allowed us to extend this pictorial metaphor so that when someone claims to be visualizing the scenes that are represented in a novel we are also tempted to assume that he is running film or some counterpart to a film in the privacy of his own head. Now, the problem is that if we do subscribe to the theory that visualizing a description is another way of looking at a film version of it, then a real film ought to do just as well, if not better; and the acceptability of any particular version would, as I have already said, boil down to a straightforward question of whether it had got it right. But there is more to it than that because, as Ryle points out, the fact that the cognate concepts of picturing, visualizing, or "seeing"—in quotation marks—are both useful and intelligible does not entail the existence of internal images that we look at. In fact, there are many good reasons for rejecting the idea of internal images, one of which is conveniently brought out in an argument developed by Richard Wollheim.

The most obvious distinction between pictures in front of the mind's eye and pictures in front of the real eye is brought out indirectly by Wollheim in an essay appended to his new edition of *Art and its Objects*. Now, although he does not explicitly address himself to the nature of mental images, the argument that he develops about physical representation inescapably draws our attention to the peculiarities of mental ones. He recognizes that there is a form of seeing that is appropriate to representation and identifies a requirement that he calls the two-fold thesis. This can be applied to representational objects such as paintings, drawings, photos, and of course movies, but is interestingly inapplicable to the pictorial experiences of the mind's eye. What the two-fold thesis says, in effect, is that in looking at a physical representation, a picture and so forth, my attention must be distributed, though not equally, between two things: between the medium that affords or sustains the representation, and whatever it is that the representation shows. So that in looking, for example, at Rembrandt's *Polish Rider* in the Frick museum, there are two intentional objects. I can see the young horseman, but I can also see Rembrandt's paintwork.

This disjunction is analogous to the one previously pointed out by E. H. Gombrich, who distinguished between seeing canvas, on the one hand, and seeing nature, on the other. According to Gombrich, however, the seeing of one actually precluded the possibility of seeing

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the other. To reinforce this claim that the two forms of vision alternate with one another, he drew an analogy with the amgibuous figures, such as the famous Duck/Rabbit, in which the seeing of one aspect requires the complete extinction of the alternative. Wollheim argues that Gombrich has given us an inappropriate and misleading analogy, because while we would all acknowledge that seeing the duck rules out the possibility of seeing the rabbit, the proper appreciation of a painting requires the two aspects to interpenetrate rather than alternate. Wollheim's argument is that the painterly virtues of an artist such as Manet would be unrecognizable if in looking at his pictures we had to alternate visual attention between the material features on the painting and the object that the painting was representing.

Now in a sense, this disagreement between Wollheim and Gombrich does not really influence my argument, although the question of optical illusions is relevant and worth considering. As far as I'm concerned, what Wollheim's two-fold thesis reveals is a distinction with regard to vision which seems hard, perhaps impossible, to apply to mental images. The point is that the divided attention that Wollheim rightly insists is appropriate to the seeing of material representations such as pictures is almost unintelligible in the context of mental images. It is impossible to attach any significant meaning to the idea of switching one's attention from the object of one's imaginings to the medium that affords them their visibility. It may seem unfair to compare mental images with paintings, in which the brushwork is such a conspicuous part of the medium. After all, we would hardly expect mental pictures to betray visible signs of handiwork. A more reasonable comparison might be made with paintings in which the artist has systematically effaced all sign of his brushwork and by means of liquid glazes provided the viewer with an apparently unmediated view of the object itself. Yet Wollheim's disjunction still holds true, because close examination almost immediately reveals the inherent properties of the medium no matter how inconspicuous the artist tries to make it. Impalpable and invisible though the painted surface might seem, there is always some point at which the visible artifact hosting the illusion becomes self-evident to the spectator. Even when the representation is made vanishingly diaphanous, as it is in the case of a faithful color transparency, there is always some perceptual procedure capable of driving a wedge

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between the picture and the objects that are to be seen *in* it. The most diaphanous representation shows non-pictorial properties in ways that are inconceivable in the case of mental images. For example, apart from the blemishes one learns to overlook in a photograph, it inevitably has a determinate size, which is an inescapably visible property of the format without the slightest pictorial significance.

We may see Helvellyn in a three-by-four-inch snapshot just as clearly as if it were shown in a huge fifteen-foot-by-twenty-foot projection. The Helvellyn that we are seeing has not changed size. While it makes perfectly good sense to ask how large the *picture* is, such a question is completely meaningless when it comes to picturing Helvellyn in our mind's eye. We can't ask the question: how large does the picture look? We can only ask the question: how large does Helvellyn *seem*?

To summarize these points: although mental images and photos are like one another in that they afford us visions of things that are not literally *there*, they differ in an important respect. The intentional objects that we see in a picture are afforded by something that *is* literally present—an intermediate physical object with all sorts of determinate properties of its own, some of which enable it to fly under a flag of pictorial convenience (and not necessarily one flag). The determinate properties of the picture may be such that they afford mutually exclusive visions. For example, three intersecting lines can host the image of the inside corner of a room or the outside corner of a cube. A symmetrical pattern of black and white patches can yield the impression of a white vase seen against a black background or two black profiles facing one another against a white background. What makes these visual experiences so striking is the fact that the alternation of aspects is visibly afforded by something that is neither, but is merely a series of patches on the page. And even when the visible properties of the hosting format are used up, so that they vanish without perceptual residue into one another, the viewer is still left with the subliminal assurance that there is a non-pictorial substrate shared in turn, cox and box, by each of his alternate visions. For obvious reasons, the visibility of the hosting medium is inversely proportional to the number of properties it lends to each or any of the visions it affords us. In the case of a natural object such as a cloud, only a few of its visible properties are on loan to alternative appearances since most of its visible assets are tied up in representing

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the cloud in its official capacity. Which is the reason why Hamlet has such an uphill struggle persuading Polonius to see whales, weasels, and camels. Admittedly, Polonius has more urgent things on his mind at that moment, but if we compare that scene with the one in *King Lear* when Edgar, in the guise of Poor Tom, persuades his blind father to see the view from a non-existent clifftop, we will immediately recognize that seeing absent things with the naked eye, even in such an amorphous and unpromising candidate as a cloud, is quite unlike seeing absent things with the mind's eye where there is nothing, formed or unformed, in which to entertain the vision.

If Edgar's commentary works—and Gloucester's absurd behavior a moment later shows that it must have done because he falls flat on his face on the grass—it seems reasonable, though not necessary, to assume that he has in some way seen the cliff or at least the vertiginous view. The reason why I say it is not necessary to assume that he has visualized the view, is that it is possible to grasp the point of a visual account without having to go through the labor of envisioning it. In fact, when Francis Galton asked his friends to recall the appearance of their breakfast table, he was surprised to find that some of them could itemize and list everything that was on the breakfast table, but refused to concede that they had a visual image of what it was they were listing. This has obvious relevance to the problem of how we understand a novel, how it is represented in the reader's imagination, and whether in fact it is visualized at all.

Let us assume that Gloucester does cooperatively visualize, just as it also seems reasonable to assume that Edgar himself has to visualize the scene in order to create such a vivid, visual description of it. In parenthesis, I should say that this last consideration was the reason why on the three occasions that I've staged *King Lear,* I've always asked the actor playing Edgar to close his eyes when he comes to the line "How fearful 'tis to cast one's eyes so low" to emphasise the helpfulness of extinguishing the vision of present things when trying to visualize the appearance of absent ones. And this is reinforced when Edgar can be seen to open his eyes again with the words "I'll look no more."

If our own reaction to Edgar's speech is anything to go by, the vista in his mind's eye is very vivid. I was going to say it springs into existence, and yet that is the very thing that it cannot do, because the description is inescapably consecutive. We then have to ask what sort

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of visibilia occupied the as-yet-undescribed parts of the picture. In fact, the question of what one could be said to imagine halfway through a vivid description is no less problematic than the question of what one sees when it is finished. If mental images were as pictorial as our language about them implies they might be, it should be possible to say something at least about the visible properties of the as-yet-unmentioned features. If, as we often say, it is left rather vague, then why should we be at a loss when it comes to say what the vagueness itself looks like? After all, this is not a problem in the case of real pictures. There are many ways in which pictorial information can be represented vaguely in a picture, and yet it is impossible to equate any of these forms of pictorial vagueness with the so-called vagueness of mental images. Perhaps I can explain what I mean by analyzing some of the ways in which real physical pictures can show vagueness.

There was a controversy surrounding one of the most talked-about paintings in the Venetian exhibition—Titian's *Flaying of Marcias*. It was claimed that the canvas was unfinished, although some experts insisted that as far as the idea of finish or conclusion could usefully be applied to Titian's late work, the painting was to all intents and purposes complete. In their view, it was no less complete than other works of the same period he was happy to relinquish to his patron, and yet for modern spectators unfamiliar with, or unfriendly to, Titian's later style it seemed incomplete, slapdash, and, you might say, vague in the sense that it was not easy to see all that it supposedly represented. I am not referring to iconographic problems, since these arise in paintings that are more self-evidently finished and detailed, but to the crude perceptual problem of how much visual information you can glean about the various objects Titian tries to represent. We have to take it on trust, for instance, that Apollo is using a knife rather than a blunt twig to skin the impudent victim, and it is only by referring to Winternitz's essay on the iconography of musical instruments that we can infer just how many strings the viol in the other corner of the picture might have. In other words, the painting is indeterminate with respect to certain features of the objects it represents. And yet the smudginess of the canvas, which seems perceptually hospitable to some and maddeningly noncommittal to others, is at least visible in its own right, being, as it is, a determinate property of the painted surface. This is something that I cannot

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imagine in the case of the mental image, which is not vague because of some smudginess but vague because it has unmentioned features. Since I began by raising the question of an unfinished description, perhaps it would be fairer to compare the incipient mental image with a painting that is unarguably incomplete.

There is a small panel by Michelangelo in the National Gallery in which several figures remain to be painted. They are recognizably blocked in *Terre Verte*, and although it's impossible to say for certain what these expectant silhouettes would have looked like if Michelangelo had finished them, the picture preserves, in a way that mental images conspicuously do not, the spatial relationship of both the existing figures and the forthcoming ones. A comparable principle applies to mutilated pictures, in which the absconded fragment is visibly conspicuous by its absence, and the visible properties of the non-pictorial repair affords the viewer a reminder of what might have been. Now, perceptual excuses like this simply cannot be applied to the supposed vagueness or incompleteness of mental images. It is not a question of poor resolution, smudginess, or vagueness, because although the identity of objects may be lost in a blurred physical picture, their spatial relationships are preserved. In the case of mental images, it is usually the other way round. On cross-examination, subjects can often list the items of a scene they have imagined and still make serious mistakes about their relative positions. When items are omitted from the report there is no mention, or indeed experience, of a visibly vacant slot. These findings are so inconsistent with the rules of material images that some people have been led to argue that mental images or mental representations have much more in common with language than they do with pictures. In fact, since the early 1970s, when the controversy about mental images became a major issue in the psychological community, a line has been drawn between those who uphold the so-called *imagist* position and those who argue that our mental representations are essentially *propositional* rather than pictorial.

In the effort to see exactly what is at stake in this conflict, we have to understand just what the opponents mean when they refer to images and propositions respectively. It is claimed, for example, that images represent objects analogically. This is another way of saying that the structural relationship between their parts corresponds to the visible relationships between the parts of the object represented. It is,

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in other words, a relationship based on visible resemblance, though not necessarily a perfect one. For example, there may be visible discrepancies some of which are intended, and some not. Here are some intentional ones:

An architect builds a scale model of a new site and as long as the client makes an intelligent allowance for scale he can identify a visible relationship between the proportions of the model buildings and the proportions of the buildings that will eventually spring up on that site. When the enterprise is complete, he will recognize the model as an image of it by virtue of the fact that there is a one-to-one mapping from points on the model to points on the completed building. In other words, there is a visible resemblance between the two entities. Apart from the question of scale, there may be an equally intelligible discrepancy with respect to color and texture.

The architect may, as Sir John Soane did, construct his model out of boxwood or out of some material from which the viewer is not intended to read off the appearance of the visible surfaces of the finished buildings. In which case, the architect may have to persuade the client by showing him a small sample of the textured concrete with which he intends to clad the surface. The image of the projected building may have to be provided in installments, and it is up to the client to integrate these installments in his imagination. All the same, both the boxwood model and the small concrete sample are canonical instances of visual images in the sense that a subset of their visible properties physically resembles a subset of the visible properties or whatever it is that they are understood to represent.

Now, the upholders of the imagistic position insist that mental images represent by virtue of the same principle. And although they laugh off the suggestion that they are sponsoring a theory of pictures in the head, it is rather hard to see exactly why they are not. The experimental evidence that has recently been aduced in favor of the imagery position makes fascinating reading, despite the fact that it is not easy to get a complete conceptual grasp of the result. And as opponents of mental imagery imply, it is possible to explain many of the results without having to make the logically embarrassing assumption that the mind's eye is scanning pictorial representations of reality.

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Apart from the purely introspective experience of imagery, there is evidence that seems to imply that the imagination is visual insofar as it seems to compete for the psychological resources that would otherwise be employed in processing real vision. For example, it has been shown several times that when subjects are asked to retrieve and report certain features of an imagined scene, their eyes move as if they were scanning a physical image. Now we cannot pretend that they are scanning a mental image with their physical eyes; that would be nonsense. But there is, perhaps, a coherent analogy to be made with the conjugate movements of the physical eyes. Everyone knows that the eyes are yoked together to make up a coherent gaze when following a moving object. It is less well known that the synchrony is not the result of both eyes seeing the same object and therefore following it synchronously. If that were so, you would expect one eye to stay still as soon as you closed it, whereas of course the movement of both eyes is more or less unimpaired even when one eye is closed and the other eye is following the object: the blind eye seems to behave as if it were tracking an invisible object, or you might say an object in front of its mental eye. Now it is tempting to argue that something analogous is happening in the case of the eye movements that accompany imagination. (I say analogous, because I am not suggesting that the physical eyeballs are synchronized to the paired movements of non-existent eyeballs.) What I am saying is that the evidence is not inconsistent with the idea that real sight and mind sight share the same spatially organized system, and that the nervous activity of scanning activates the functional movement of the real eyeball.

Other evidence in favor of this view comes from a famous experiment at the start of the century when a researcher with the (charmingly appropriate) name of Perky found that subjects facing an illuminated screen often confused things they were imagining with faint images thrown, unknown to them, onto the screen by the experimenter. What would happen is that they faced a ground glass screen, and were then asked to imagine a banana while unpredictably a real image of a banana was sometimes thrown onto the screen. They could then find it quite difficult to discriminate between the image that they were putting in front of their mind's eye, and the image which was being supplied by the experimenter in front of their real eyes. This research has been extended and sophisticated by two

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American investigators who showed that when subjects were asked to visualize something while facing an illuminated screen, their capacity to detect a visual stimulus on the screen—a little flash, for example—was recognizably impaired, whereas their efficiency in detecting an auditory stimulus at the same time was affected much less. This must have meant that visual resources were being used up whilst employing their mind's eye.

These experiments have implications comparable to ones discovered by Lee Brookes of McMaster University in 1968. Brookes showed that when subjects were asked to recall certain specified features of a geometrical figure, their response was much faster when they reported the items verbally than when they had to identify these features visually by pointing to the alternatives on a wall chart. Apart from the fact that both the results of these experiments and the conclusions drawn up from them have been disputed, they do not by any means prove the coherent spatiality of mental images. In fact, interest in imagery was quite indolent until two sets of experiments proved, or seem to prove, that mental images could actually be rotated and scrutinized as if they were to all intents and purposes spatially integrated pictorial representations in front of the real eye.

The experiment that set the alarm bells ringing was first published in 1971 by Roger Shepherd and Jaqueline Meltzer, although the preliminary results were privately circulated in a short paper entitled *On Turning Something Over in One's Mind*. The experiments went something like this: subjects were asked to judge whether paired projections of block-like figures were identical or not. The results indicated that the experimental subjects were mentally rotating the image of these remembered figures until they were in a position that was favorable to make a reliable comparison of their two shapes. In fact, the time taken to arrive at an assessment of identity or otherwise increased in relation to the size of the angle by which the two figures were out of register when they were first presented to the real eye. The rate was the same regardless of the plane of rotation. It took just as much time to achieve rotation in the plane of the screen as it did in the fore and aft axis. Here, it seems, was incontestable evidence in favor of a spatially organized pictorial representation inside the imagination.

Meanwhile, at MIT Stephen Kosslyn and his associates were carrying out experiments whose results led them to conclude that

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mental images played an important part in the retrieval of visual information. Kosslyn's experiments were inspired by the introspective reports of people who often insist they have to form an image of a room or a house before they can say how many chairs or windows there are in it. Kosslyn designed an experiment to test this informal situation. In one experiment, he asked his subjects to memorize a picture of a motor launch. He then asked them if there was an anchor or a flag at the prow. Having fixed their attention on the prow or the front end of the craft, he then asked them questions about the furnishings on the bridge and on the stern, respectively, and found that the speed of their answers was proportional to the distance between the prow and the target about which he then questioned them. The mind's eye, it seemed, was scanning a mental image and taking longer to go from prow to stern than it did to go from prow to bridge. He also tried to see how altering the size of the mental image influenced the speed of the report. He invited some of his subjects to visualize an animal as if viewed from close up and then as seen from far away. He then asked them to report the presence or absence of certain features such as whiskers, claws, or a split upper lip. The results he obtained were once again consistent with the idea that a pictorial image was being looked at. The reports were recognizably and repeatedly faster when the subject was asked to report a larger image than it was when he was being asked to visualize and report a smaller one. He obtained the same results when the size of the images was manipulated indirectly. Instead of asking the subject to visualize the animal as large or small, he invited them to imagine the particular creature alongside an elephant or a fly and found that it was easier to retrieve certain requested features from an animal whose image was proportionately enlarged by being put alongside a fly, than it was when the target creature was shrunk proportionately by being placed alongside a much larger animal like an elephant.

It could be argued, and indeed the anti-imagists have argued, that these results have nothing to do with imagery as such, and that the order to visualize something *large* is automatically interpreted by the subject as an instruction simply to form a *list* of features, and that it is by consulting this list, rather than by looking at a picture, that the subject succeeds or fails in his task. I do not think this will be an appropriate place to describe all the controls that Kosslyn and his

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associates introduced to meet these objections, but having made systematic and ingenious allowance for them, he still obtained results that favored the idea that images were being looked at by the mind's eye. In the last fifteen years or so, Alan Pavier at the University of Western Ontario has also obtained results that stress the functional importance of visual images, although his theory features an elaborate reciprocity between visual and verbal representations.

The opponents of imagery have not been persuaded by any of these findings. As far as they are concerned, there must be an alternative explanation that avoids the unacceptable philosophical implications of a mind's eye which has to be conceded if these rotations and inspections are indeed pictorial events. This implies that there has to be a mind's brain to recognize what the mind's eye tells it, and so on in an infinite regress. What they offer by way of an alternative explanation is a theory that says that any information expressed in a pictorial format can be represented much more productively in a propositional form, and although these propositions may yield images, these are a by-product and not essential to the mental work of the subject.

The idea of a proposition is derived in the first instance from the pioneer work of Gottlob Frege, for whom a proposition was something that was expressible as a sentence, though not necessarily to be identified with the features of any particular sentence. Unlike pictures or images that represent objects, propositions express assertions *about* objects and about the relationship between them. Unlike pictures, they can be true or false, and their truth value is to some extent invariant under paraphrase. The opponents of imagery insist that a propositional representation can do everything that a pictorial one does and more. It may be unrealistic to regard these alternatives as mutually exclusive. As I have already mentioned, Alan Pavier found it impossible to interpret his experimental results without assuming the co-existence of a verbal and a pictorial code cooperating with one another. In fact, without such a reciprocity it is quite hard to explain the way in which mental images tend to assert so much more than they visibly show. In the case of dreams, for example, what one sees in the intentional sense is often at odds with the visible appearance. Here is a dream that illustrates what I mean. It is reported by the nineteenth-century physician McNish who was, incidentally, a close personal friend of James Hog, the author of *The*

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Confessions of a Justified Sinner. McNish dreamed that he saw Versailles, and that it was

> an immense architectural creation of the gothic ages with a hundred and ten thousand minarets sprouting up and piercing the sky with their pointed pinnacles. The whole was as visibly unlike reality as possible. And yet this never occurred once to my mind, and while gazing upon the visionary fabric it never occurred to me for a moment that it had ever appeared other than it now did. It was the same now as when I previously beheld it.

I assume that everyone is familiar with this sort of paradox, and that we all recognize how hard it is to give a coherent account of such experiences. Perhaps I can reinforce McNish's example with a dream of my own.

I recently went to Cambridge to deliver a lecture, and in my apprehension I had rehearsed my arrival in a series of increasingly alarming dreams. About four nights before, I dreamed that I was parking my car in what I knew to be Trinity Lane, although it was from its visible appearance also a narrow side street behind the Santo in Padua. At the end of the lane, I could see the master of Trinity waving hospitably at me, and he was the actor Michael Horden. Now there was no sense in my dream that Horden, the actor, was playing the part, or that he had popped in between the election or anyone else's hopes. As far as I was concerned in the dream, Horden and the master were one and the same, in spite of the fact that I also knew, simultaneously, that the master and Sir Andrew Huxley were identical. The rest of the dream was so humiliating, for which I blame neither Sir Michael nor Sir Andrew, that I shall draw a veil over it.

The fact that one can dream of something without its necessarily looking like what one knows it to be means that there is at least one class of mental images whose members have what pictures and photographs do not, namely, intrinsic propositional content. For someone who knows what Versailles actually looks like, the only way in which a photograph could justify its claim to be a photograph *of* Versailles, is by resembling it; whereas when a *dream* image of Versailles comes before the mind, such a resemblance does not appear to be necessary. Admittedly, self-contradictory images of this sort are confined to dreams, and there is no conceivable way in which someone who knows that Versailles looks like could even try to visualize it as a Gothic pile; but this does not mean that ordinary

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mental imagery is devoid of propositional content altogether. On the contrary, to visualize something, as opposed to simply seeing a picture of it, is to see it under some form of description, and this is especially noticeable when it comes to visualizing something as a result of reading a description of it. In that case, the description under which the image is experienced is determined to a large extent by the description that generates it.

This article is an extract from the author's forthcoming book, *Subsequent Performances*, to be published by Faber and Faber.

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Roger Shattuck

Words and Images: Thinking and Translation

I. A FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION

On Monday, September 22, 1800, Coleridge wrote William Godwin a characteristically playful and profound letter. He discussed the sentiment of being united with a greater whole, the advisability of baptism for his two infant sons, the Llama's dung pellet, the power of words, and the nature of the conscious will. He concluded the letter with a series of burning questions.

> Is *Thinking* impossible without arbitrary signs? And how far is the word "arbitrary" a misnomer? Are not words, etc., parts and germinations of the plant? And what is the law of their growth? In something of this sort I would endeavour to destroy the old antithesis of Words and Things; elevating, as it were, Words into Things and livings things too.[1]

The letter deserves its reputation. In a few sentences Coleridge restates the fundamental themes of language theory and his own preferred hypothesis that words belong with things, not by arbitrary or conventional association, but in some organic or natural fashion. He is reviving the position Plato toyed with in the *Cratylus* on "primary names . . . which show the nature of things" by their etymology or their sound. Coleridge's metaphoric plant lies ready to overgrow everything, embracing word, idea, and thing, subject and object, consciousness and what it feeds on. But let's stay with the first barefaced question: "Is *Thinking* impossible without arbitrary signs?"

Sooner or later we all wonder about the fundamental nature of thought. What supports it? Against what ground do we detect it? Can

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it ever be distinguished from the self that claims to be its subject and its agent? Since people in the same culture appear to understand one another through a set of linguistic signs that is unique, yet similar to other such sets, does thought at its deepest level observe a set of universal procedures or laws shared by all human minds? In its most mature stages, does human thought take place directly in words?

Being neither linguist nor psychologist, I shall not try to answer all these questions. Nor could I answer them if I were both linguist and psychologist. For we cannot directly observe thought at its source. Memory is no true mirror of the mind. Our verbal accounts of what we observe in other people's behavior and speech are already skewed toward existing categories of language. Introspection, potentially the most fertile source of information about the mind, tends to paralyze or to alter the very processes it would report on. Indirection appears to afford the most reliable approach.

A long history of psychobiological experiments has led lately to alleged discoveries about our two brain hemispheres and how they specialize in certain modes of thought. The investigations resemble the method of locating your opponent's fleet in the fascinating children's game of "Battleship." W.J., the epileptic "cured" by severing his *corpus sallosum,* has provided a mass of alluring revelations about right and left in the mind. But where, in all these strange cleavages and migrations of special powers to one side or the other, does humanity start and animality end? Let us go back once more to Coleridge's question about the relation of thinking to language.

There is much to suggest to us that without language there is no thought—at least no cognitive, discursive thought as it has taken shape in all developed human cultures. To begin with the most simplistic example, consider the familiar pseudo-joke (E.M. Forster recorded it) about the old lady on the train. On being accused of illogicality and wandering inconsistency in her conversation, she protests: "How can I tell what I think till I see what I say?" The implication is straightforward: vague affective rumination does not constitute thought. Verbal utterance alone can shape and certify obscure mental interchanges which, without speech, remain sub-cognitive.

What is often referred to in anthropology and linguistics as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis affirms that the language the old lady speaks

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has shaped her thinking from the start by supplying its categories, distinctions, relations, and modalities. They have all been prepared ahead of time by the culture. We rely on the conventions and commonplaces of language more than we think for ourselves. Sometimes, through clichés and proverbs, the language appears to think for us. A skillful writer may play in and with these ready-mades of speech the way a surfer rides the waves.

Plato was exploring comparable connections between thought and language in the *Theaetetus*.

> The soul when thinking appears to me to be just talking—asking questions of herself and answering them, affirming and denying. And when she has arrived at a decision . . . this is called her opinion. I say that to form an opinion is to speak, and opinion is a word spoken,—I mean to oneself and in silence, not aloud to another.[2]

One of my most vivid childhood memories of semi-forbidden experience was hiding behind a door in order to eavesdrop on an eighty-year-old neighbor lady, still spry and lucid, who began to talk aloud to herself non-stop as soon as she thought she was alone. She was a one-woman symposium. Effortlessly tapping the stream of consciousness, she uttered recognizable thoughts (even if fragmentary) about her family and friends, including, occasionally and terrifyingly, *me*. Children playing by themselves will do likewise. The rest of us middle-aged adults have simply learned how to turn down the volume.

It seems probable that the capacity to use language, the most socially useful form of behavior among us after sex, and one of the most flexible and creative, was grafted into the genetic material by natural selection. The extreme position has been taken up by the molecular biologist, Jacques Monod. He does not believe that early human societies gradually developed language; on the contrary, he is convinced that the acquisition of language, at first by a few exceptional individuals, decided the future of the species and led to human society and culture as we know them. The relation of language and thought is intimate, Monod declares, because they arose together: ". . . between the cognitive functions and the symbolic language they call forth and by which they express themselves, there exists in modern man a close symbiosis which can be the result only of a long shared evolution."[3] Monod throws the full weight of his Nobel prize

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behind these speculations. A few steps more and this line of argument would replace Kant's a priori categories of time, space, and causation with a single all-encompassing category: language, accompanied by its universal grammar of functions and relations. Kant called his categories "transcendental," meaning (as I understand him) that they are innate to our thought processes and mold all our experience, while themselves remaining inaccessible to investigation by those same thought processes. In the hands of thinkers like Monod, language tends to become the preeminent transcendental category of mind, an instrument remarkably well adapted for use on the scale of ordinary human perception and experience. I am compelled to add that on the scale of the infinitesimal and the astronomic, language tends to break down—as Pascal told us it would in his image of the two abysses.

The opposition to this identification of thought with language is strong and widespread. Aristotle, without whom we would probably not be talking as we are today, affirms sturdily that "the soul never thinks without an image."[4] The psychobiologists probing our left and right hemispheres emphasize the wealth of cognitive and useful processes that can take place in the brain apparently unshaped by language. However, the advanced verbal circuitry we call communication simplifies and classifies every surge and signal inside us before it emerges as speech. Can we trust any report, any authority, about the nature of thinking at its source?

Certain testimony may be privileged in the face of such circumstances. In order to explain how he made some of his most original discoveries about light and simultaneity, that led to the theory of relativity, Einstein spoke to Max Wertheimer of combining images, sometimes visual, sometimes muscular: "These thoughts did not come in any verbal formulation. I very rarely think in words at all. A thought comes, and I may try to express it in words afterward."[5]

Emerson probes down to the same level of mental activity.

> A man conversing in earnest, if he watch his intellectual processes, will find that a material image more or less luminous arises in his mind, contemporaneous with every thought, which furnishes the vestment of the thought.[6]

Many anthologies of American literature have picked up Ezra Pound's description of how he composed "In a Station of the Metro."

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And that evening, as I went home along the rue Raynouard, I was still trying [to write the poem] and I found, suddenly, the expression. I do not mean that I found the words, but there came an equation . . . not in speech, but in little splotches of color.

The contemporary French poet-critic Henri Meschonnic offers the most succinct formulation: "Creativity is prelinguistic."[7] His statement summarizes the important scientific work of Eric Lenneberg in *The Biological Foundations of Language*. In his superb chapter on "Language and Cognition" Lenneberg argues that conceptualization is fundamental to thought and precedes language. "Words tag the processes by which the species deals cognitively with the environment."[8]

Another persuasive modern work on the question of the fundamental nature of human thought and its relation to language is written by a scientifically trained psychologist turned art critic and historian. Rudolph Arnheim, in a book called *Visual Thinking*,[9] maintains that perception and thinking take place in images or articulate shapes that belong to a person's mental life from earliest childhood, long before speech and continuing after its development. Visual thinking favors a continuous field of mental events, whereas language is necessarily cast in a linear succession of preexisting categories. "Purely verbal thinking," writes Arnheim, "is the prototype of thoughtless thinking, the automatic recourse to connections retrieved from storage."[10] Such a tendentious statement underestimates the associative and poetic resources of language. And by its insistence on the visual, the book slights coenesthesia—the aggregate of all bodily impressions, internal and external, that give us the sentiment of being alive as ourselves. Thinking may well start here. Yet Arnheim displays a steadily perceptive, widely informed mind that is never overwhelmed by the imperialist claims of contemporary linguistics. I recommend his book to anyone concerned with mental processes and with art, and with their consequences for education.

All the positions referred to in this debate, fascinating as they may be, remain speculative. To my mind, the weight of the evidence and, equally important to me, the results of my own introspection favor the second position. Except in certain routine or habitual exchanges, language comes after thought—sorting, binding, tagging, filing away, and finally providing us with miniaturized verbal tokens or claim

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checks to hold on to or to use. Combined in playful or artful ways, a collection of these tokens can suggest exciting new patterns of thought, quite unpredictable in range and velocity. Yet for all its remarkable achievements, language remains subordinate to the two primary elements, thought and reality, whose incorrigible elusiveness we pursue and try to connect by using language (witness this sentence).

I can do no more than affirm the last statement. I cannot prove it. Nor can the contrary be proved. We have reached the frontier of faith and belief.

If thinking is possible without arbitrary signs, then there is a significant conclusion to be drawn. If thinking does not consist in verbal processes, our adaptability as social creatures using a symbolic language rests upon our capacity to *translate*—to transform mental into verbal, and vice-versa. I am putting forward an utterly commonplace hypothesis, which may be no more than a metaphor. In a number of languages, particularly in French, the word *translate* is often used in precisely this sense of translating non-verbal experiences into words. Proust, who spent three years wrestling with Ruskin by translating him, comes back regularly to the concept of translation lodged at the inception of thought. It is a refrain, reaffirmed at the climax of *In Search of Lost Time* when the narrator is talking about the insights into style and perception that led him to undertake a novel, this novel, in order to communicate those insights.

> Si j'essayais de me rendre compte de ce qui se passe en effet au moment où une chose nous fait une certaine impression, . . . je m'apercevais que ce livre essentiel, le seul livre vrai, un grand écrivain n'a pas, dans le sens courant, à l'inventer, puisqu'il existe déjà en chacun de nous, mais à le traduire. Le devoir et la tâche d'un écrivain sont ceux d'un traducteur.[11]
>
> If I tried to describe to myself precisely what happens when something makes a strong impression on us . . . I perceived that the essential book, the only true work, is one that a great writer never need invent, as we mean that word, for it exists already in each of us, but must rather translate. The task, the duty of a great writer is that of a translator.

Not just the writer. It is possible, in the specific domain into which we have ventured, that we could define man as the animal who translates. He translates his pre-verbal perceptions and impressions, not as the frog does into two alternative behaviors, attack and flight, but

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into the plastic medium of language, by which he retains, communicates, manipulates, and finally responds to his experience. It is more than a metaphor to say: "All language is (always, already) translation."

II. A HYPOTHESIS

If there is thought before language, we should have a look at the image as its potential medium or vehicle. I shall limit what I have to say on the subject to a modest hypothesis or historical speculation. The inventors of photography (ca. 1840) and of the moving picture (ca. 1900) have influenced our use and abuse of images in ways we are probably still unaware. One comparison will afford us insight into how we have steered or yielded to this process. In the past hundred years, two major art forms in the West have followed what appear to be opposite courses. From Impressionism to Jackson Pollock, the still image in painting moved generally away from figuration and illustration (and from subjects adequately described by verbal titles) toward the direct rendering or exploration of inner and affective experience. In an earlier essay in *The Innocent Eye,* I have traced the successive steps of this evolution through the extended career of Monet, who was active until 1926.[12] A number of prominent exceptions (Morandi, Magritte, Duchamp) do not invalidate the overall tendency to liberate the painted surface from the conventions of visual perception, a tendency that may well have reached its limit.

During approximately the same period, the moving image (film and television) moved away from the potential freedom of silent film (what René Clair called "pure cinema": the invention of visual and rhythmic sequences outside the narrative structures of theater and novel) toward sound film anchored in a written script usually adapted from a play or novel.[13] An unprepared audience today does not know what to make of Clair's *Entr'acte* (1921), a silent film improvised around a series of jagged images scrawled by the painter-poet Picabia. The thirty-minute work suggests a *danse macabre* motif soon exploded by wild juxtapositions; Clair does not follow a narrative line. He exploits a total freedom of montage to create the sensation of dilated and contracted time, multiple points of view, and childish jokes. I find the film as suggestive and as exhilarating as the best action painting and not unrelated to it. This expressionist

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dimension of film has now gone mostly underground into experimental cinema, except where it has resurfaced in beautiful and enigmatic sequences in films like *2001* (Kubrick) and *Last Year at Marienbad* (Reanais and Robbe-Grillet).

One of the consequences of this opposed evolution of painting and moving pictures in our time is that films and television programs can be seen as twice translated, twice removed from elemental and unarticulated thought processes rather than seeking them at their source. When Gothic architecture opened huge spaces in its walls for windows, the new art of stained glass was quickly harnessed to illustrating Bible stories and the lives of saints. It developed its own imaginative nonfigurative forms only in the margins and interstices—and in a few glorious rose windows. Somewhat in the same way, film has been set to illustrating literary narratives or dramas rather than to inventing its own forms. Would we want it otherwise? A greater familiarity with the variety of the early silent film might modify some of our habits and expectations. Still, narrative plot or story remains the most universal mode of organizing human experience, and what we see on the screen is usually an illustrated story in which pictures take over from words.

Of all artists Flaubert has expressed the strongest objections to the practice of illustrating books.

> Never, as long as I live, shall I allow anyone to illustrate me, because the most beautiful literary description is eaten up by the most wretched drawing. As soon as a figure *[type]* is fixed by the pencil, it loses that character of generality, that harmony with a thousand known objects which make the reader say: "I've seen that" or "That must be so." A woman in a drawing looks like one woman, that's all. The idea is closed, complete, and every sentence becomes useless, whereas a written woman makes one dream of a thousand women. Therefore, since this is a question of aesthetics, I absolutely refuse any kind of illustration.[14]

It was not the quality of the illustrations that enraged Flaubert. He felt in his bones the contaminating, paralyzing effect that any particularized image can have on the suggestiveness of the word. An image short-circuits the reader's imagination and prevents him from conjuring up a character or a scene out of his own associations and fantasies. Flaubert's outburst insists that the novel mirrors not nature but words—words that in turn evoke a special universe of virtual

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entities and events. He provides a needed gloss on Conrad's words in the preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus:* "My task . . . is before all to make you see." A novel presents something deeper than visual images; it assembles laminations and overlappings and dissociations of thought that do not coincide with any simple sensation of sight or sound.

One can imagine Flaubert protesting even more vehemently against the translation or illustration of his work in moving pictures. Existing adaptations of *Madame Bovary,* even Renoir's, would bear him out. But I quote Flaubert's harangue because after early film-makers like Clair one discovers singularly few directors and critics on the cinematic side resisting the role of film as illustrating or adapting literary scripts. Almost everyone takes it for granted that a writer supplies the story for a film, even if the writer is the director's alter ego as *auteur.* Antonioni and Godard, though steeped in literature, have kept open only a precarious and erratic space for the non-narrative film. The affinities of the medium with poetry and music may have to evolve in the interstices—dream sequences, flashbacks, inserts, and jokes. On the other hand, film may have reached a limit in the direction of adaptation and representation, as painting may have reached a limit in the direction of non-representation.

III. MORE QUESTIONS

Beyond all fluctuations of style and fashion, I take it that sound films and TV programs based on narrative scripts are here to stay. In the course of time we will mold them to our tastes, and the medium will mold us. At this juncture I wish to raise a number of nagging questions that bear on how these forms affect our minds and behavior.

(1) Are film and TV essentially the same medium? Most judicious critics would answer that the large size of the screen, the darkness of a movie house, the relative freedom from interruptions, and the presence of a sizeable, silent, and anonymous audience give film-viewing a far different texture from that of watching television in the home. These considerations have tended to make TV programs more auditory and less visual than the movies. In soap opera and in the

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news you can usually turn off the image with less loss than that of turning off the sound. Video remains an illustration of audio, of words.

To these not very startling observations I would add one more. I have long been unconvinced by Bertold Brecht's attempt to introduce into the theater a *Verfremdungseffekt,* a distancing of spectators from the stage activities by various devices in order to encourage them to reflect on the significance of what they are watching. Aristotle had a surer sense of the theater setting when he described our double fixation in terms of pity and terror. Breaking the illusion will not hold a large audience for long, and it does not explain the power of a few of Brecht's plays. On the other hand, the distancing or estranging effect is surprisingly appropriate for television, a medium that lends itself to a certain separation between spectator and screen. Watching a TV set at home among family and friends usually entails interruptions that override the program or tape, informal heckling and discussion, even turning back a tape to see what really happened. The television situation has the advantage of divesting the movie image of its opulence and its magic inviolability. Except for a few call-in shows, however, television programs have made few attempts to encourage reflective or critical reactions on the part of viewers.

(2) Has sound film finally broken up the big estates handed out by Lessing to word, as the medium of narrative, and to image, as the medium of representation? Flaubert would roar back the answer that a sound film, in attempting a complete representation, constitutes a total travesty of a novel and a denial of literature. We could also reply that a sound film achieves a new synthesis of narrative and descriptive, a four-dimensional work of art that Lessing never imagined in the *Laocoön.*

Filmmakers and critics of the first rank have the strongest statements to make. In 1932, Sergei Eisenstein remarked on "the inner murmurings" in Dreiser's novels and went on: "The true material for the sound film is, of course, the monologue."[15] Few of us would swallow the "of course," and we have serious reservations about the lengthy voice-over sequences that film monologue usually employs. André Bazin, discussing Bresson's form of pure cinema, goes a step further. "The screen emptied of images and given back to literature marks the triumph of cinematographic realism."[16] Both statements

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imply that in sound film, word will one day subdue image and appear to welcome that development even though much of both men's work affirms the priority of image over sound.

These conclusions arise in part because the moving image, with or without sound, introduces an element absent from the still image and even from prose: strictly measured and manipulated time. As a result, film has relations to dance, music, and poetry, which are constantly luring it away from narrative prose and drama. I find myself wondering when we shall enter a new era of classical practice and find another Lessing to describe it. Not soon.

(3) As an art form that to a large degree represents visible, material reality, has film developed adequate conventions of acting, cinematography, and editing to convey abstract ideas, inner states of mind, past and future tenses, and the first person? Since we follow most films without too much difficulty, the question is not often raised. Critics speak of a narrative style of *découpage classique* developed in Hollywood during the thirties and forties when our conventions of shooting and editing were laid down. But the conventions remain elementary and provisional.[17] What does a dissolve signify: fantasy? memory? passage of time? Can one construct a negative shot like a negative sentence? Unlike language, film has no established vocabulary, syntax, or punctuation. How do you convey "yesterday" or "possibly" in images? Compared to the novelist, the director begins virtually *ex nihilo*.

Half a century ago, Kuleshov performed a series of experiments to demonstrate the enormous flexibility of film editing. He placed at the center of three very different sequences the identical close-up of an actor with an intense yet neutral expression. Viewers unanimously praised the convincing way in which the actor expressed the emotion appropriate to each of the three sequences: hunger, grief, joy. We may laugh at the mistake, but the suggestiveness of deadpan acting has not gone away. Every film must reinvent the conventions. You cannot be sure whether the cowboy dressed in black is the hero or the villain. There is no dictionary.

In his famous *Camera-Pen* manifesto (*L'Ecran français,* March 30, 1948) Alexandre Astruc asserts that "it will soon be possible to write ideas directly on film."[18] He refers to Eisenstein's thoughts of shooting or at least illustrating Marx's *Capital.* Fortunately we are

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still waiting. Film is better off without any world-wide code for concepts like *economy, justice, working class*. Because moving pictures are not the medium of ordinary communication but potential works of art, we expect and accept in a film less cliché than we do in words. A film, no matter how closely it may record the quotidian, leans toward revelation, the marvelous, neologism. Let us hope it keeps that freedom.[19]

(4) Who is more active mentally, a novel reader or a film viewer? Presumably Flaubert would vote for the reader, who must continually transform words into images. Both Eisenstein and Bazin argue strongly for the film viewer and disagree completely about the reasons.

Eisenstein insists that "montage technique obliges spectators themselves to create."[20] He is thinking of the Kuleshov effect just described. Bazin argues that depth of focus in the extended shot *(plan séquence)* encourages "a more active mental attitude on the part of the spectator and even his positive contribution to the *mise en scène*."[21] According to Bazin, in an uncut sequence we can choose what to look at, whereas dynamic editing manipulates our attention and overwhelms our thought-processes. Of course all three men are right, and we will keep on going to movies and reading.[22]

The movies, which have so far remained remarkably free of settled conventions and codes, will help us reflect about Coleridge's question whether thinking is possible without language. Despite their modest appearance, speech and reading represent the primary miracles of system and economy in human communication. At their best, moving pictures offer us quite different elements: the concrete evidence of documentary, the passive incontrovertibility of dream, and the creative leaps—visual and aural—of the imagination.

ENDNOTES

[1]*Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), vol. I, pp. 352–53.
[2]Plato, *Theaetetus*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Random House, 1937), vol. I, p. 193.
[3]Jacques Monod, *Le Hasard et la nécessité* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), p. 150.
[4]Aristotle, *On The Soul*, in *The Works of Aristotle*, ed. W.D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931), vol. III, p. 431[a].

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[5]Max Wertheimer, *Productive Thinking* (New York: Harper, 1959), p. 228. See also Albert Einstein, "Letter to Jacques Hadamard," reprinted in Brewster Ghiselin, ed., *The Creative Process: A Symposium* (New York: New American Library, 1955), pp. 43–44.

[6]Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature,* IV.

[7]Henri Meschonnic, *Pour la poésie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p. 115.

[8]Eric Lenneberg, *The Biological Foundations of Language* (New York: Wiley, 1967), p. 334.

[9]Rudolph Arnheim, *Visual Thinking* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

[10]Ibid, p. 231.

[11]Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), vol. III, p. 890.

[12]"Claude Monet: Approaching the Abyss," in Roger Shattuck, *The Innocent Eye* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1984).

[13]One of the most notable aspects of film as an art form is that we have access to its entire history including its earliest origins. The Lascaux of the movies lies in the Lumière brothers' program of shorts projected in a Paris cafe in December 1895. We know with what awe the first audiences reacted to the ghostly flickerings and how insistently they peeked behind the sheet to discover the secret. The lessons of those early days about perception and vision, reality and fantasy, are too often forgotten, overlooked even in film courses. We will never know the origins of story-telling and of picture-making; we should learn everything we can about the first revealing steps of the one art form that belongs to our age.

[14]Gustave Flaubert to Ernest Duplan, June 12, 1862 in *Œuvres complètes: Correspondence* (Paris, Conard, 1929), vol. V, pp. 25–26. In 1915 Franz Kafka felt an equally forceful revulsion to a proposal to illustrate the first edition of *The Metamorphosis*. "Please, not that—anything but that! The insect itself cannot be drawn. It cannot even be shown in the distance!" In a recent article, the painter Robert Motherwell discusses Kafka's reaction and proposes that an "identical" aversion to explicit illustration and to realist imagery contributed to the nonrepresentational art of abstract expressionism in the mid-forties (see Robert Motherwell, "Kafka's Visual Recoil: a Note," *Partisan Review*, no. 4, 1984). Motherwell's observations lead me to suggest that he and the other abstract expressionists may have been avoiding representation also in order to resist the stereotyped verbalization to which it lends itself. They favored visual thinking without words or arbitrary signs.

[15]Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949), p. 106.

[16]André Bazin, *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma* (Paris: Cerf, 1975), p. 124.

[17]The old clichés can now appear only as clichés: an ocean sunset, the wind turning the pages of a calendar. But, why, at the close of every movie, do we still look for the *words* "The End"—and find them?

[18]Alexandre Astruc, "La Caméra Stylo," *L'Ecran français,* March 30, 1948.

[19]I recommend three discussions of this prickly question of film and language: Christian Metz, "Le cinéma: langue ou langage?" in *Essais sur la signification au cinéma* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971); M.-C. Ropars-Wuilleumier, *De la littérature au cinéma* (Paris: Colin, 1970); and Bruce F. Kawin, *Mindscreen* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978).

[20]Eisenstein, *Film Sense* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1947), p. 35.

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[21]Bazin, "L'Evolution du langage cinématographique," in *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma*, op. cit., p. 75.

[22]One must never omit from this discussion the powerful yet elusive factor represented by the habits of alertness and attention the viewer has acquired. He may sit back and expect the sound-image simply to flow through him, to take over his mind. Or he may sit up and watch the effects and sequences carefully and critically. He may even try to do both at once. Most of us require at least two screenings to perceive the subtleties and implications of an intelligent movie.

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Proust (1974; winner of the 1975 National Book Award), and *The Forbidden Experiment* (1980). In addition, he is editor or coeditor of: *Selected Writings of Guillaume Apollinaire* (1950), *The Craft and Context of Translation* (1961), *Selected Works of Alfred Jarry* (1965), and *Occasions by Paul Valery* (1970). Mr. Shattuck is currently teaching at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

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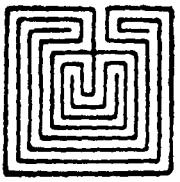

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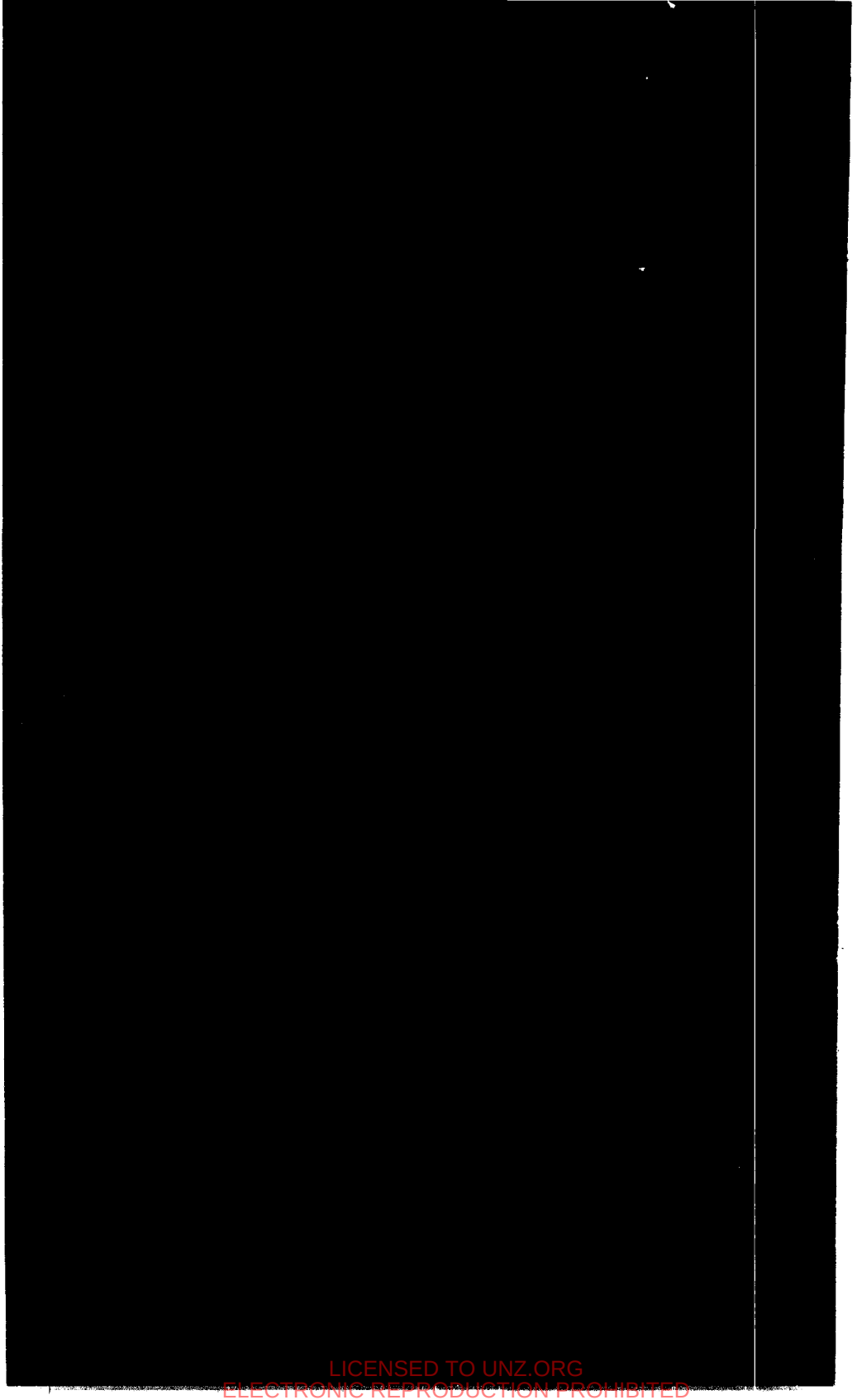
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